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Also by Philip Rahv

DISCOVERY OF EUROPE: AN ANTHOLOGY
OF AMERICAN EXPERIENCE IN THE OLD WORLD

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Fourteen Essays on Literary Themes

... PHILIP RAHV

A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

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TO
NATHALIE

FOREWORD

The fourteen pieces in this volume have all appeared in periodicals. In their present form, however, nearly all have been considerably revised, in point both of language and structure; and in some cases new material has been added. The content has for the most part remained unaltered, with the exception of the essay now entitled "Dostoevsky in *The Possessed*," which I have brought up to date to conform with my present attitudes toward doctrinal Marxism and the historical experience of the Russian revolution.

It is perhaps worth noting that the two essays on James were written before the James boom so-called was touched off, in the fall of 1944, by the publication of two anthologies of his shorter fiction. As the editor of one of those anthologies I was quite as surprised as anyone else by the unlooked-for dimensions of the interest in him and by the collapse of the resistance to his appeal in some of the literary and academic circles characterized in the shorter essay on James in this volume. But it may well be that his apotheosis is not quite what was wanted. For it appears that the long-standing prejudice against James is now giving way to an uncritical adulation equally retarding to a sound appraisal of his achievement.

A good many of these essays first appeared in *Partisan Review*; others were published in *The Kenyon Review*, *The Southern Review*, *The New Republic*, and *The Nation*. To those magazines my thanks and acknowledgments are due.

P. R.

November, 1948

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PALEFACE AND REDSKIN

Viewed historically, American writers appear to group themselves around two polar types. Paleface and redskin I should like to call the two, and despite occasional efforts at reconciliation no love is lost between them.

Consider the immense contrast between the drawing-room fictions of Henry James and the open air poems of Walt Whitman. Compare Melville's decades of loneliness, his tragic failure, with Mark Twain's boisterous career and dubious success. At one pole there is the literature of the lowlife world of the frontier and of the big cities; at the other the thin, solemn, semi-clerical culture of Boston and Concord. The fact is that the creative mind in America is fragmented and one-sided. For the process of polarization has produced a dichotomy between experience and consciousness—a dissociation between energy and sensibility, between conduct and theories of conduct, between life conceived as an opportunity and life conceived as a discipline.

The differences between the two types define themselves in every sphere. Thus while the redskin glories in his Americanism, to the paleface it is a source of endless ambiguities. Sociologically they can

be distinguished as patrician vs. plebeian, and in their aesthetic ideals one is drawn to allegory and the distillations of symbolism, whereas the other inclines to a gross, riotous naturalism. The paleface is a "high-brow," though his mentality—as in the case of Hawthorne and James—is often of the kind that excludes and repels general ideas; he is at the same time both something more and something less than an intellectual in the European sense. And the redskin deserves the epithet "lowbrow" not because he is badly educated—which he might or might not be—but because his reactions are primarily emotional, spontaneous, and lacking in personal culture. The paleface continually hankers after religious norms, tending toward a refined estrangement from reality. The redskin, on the other hand, accepts his environment, at times to the degree of fusion with it, even when rebelling against one or another of its manifestations. At his highest level the paleface moves in an exquisite moral atmosphere; at his lowest he is genteel, snobbish, and pedantic. In giving expression to the vitality and to the aspirations of the people, the redskin is at his best; but at his worst he is a vulgar anti-intellectual, combining aggression with conformity and reverting to the crudest forms of frontier psychology.

James and Whitman, who as contemporaries felt little more than contempt for each other, are the purest examples of this discussion.* In reviewing *Drum Taps* in 1865 the young James told off the grand plebeian innovator, advising him to stop declaiming and go sit in the corner of a rhyme and meter school, while the innovator, snorting at the novelist of scruples and moral delicacy, said "Feathers!" Now this mutual repulsion between the two major figures in American literature would be less important if it were mainly personal or aesthetic in reference. But the point is that it has a profoundly national and social-historical character.

James and Whitman form a kind of fatal antipodes. To this, in part, can be traced the curious fact about them that, though each has become the object of a special cult, neither is quite secure in his reputation. For most of the critics and historians who make much of Whitman disparage James or ignore him altogether, and vice versa. Evidently

*According to Edith Wharton, James changed his mind about Whitman late in life. But this can be regarded as a private fact of the Jamesian sensibility, for in public he said not a word in favor of Whitman.

the high valuation of the one is so incongruous with the high valuation of the other that criticism is chronically forced to choose between them—which makes for a breach in the literary tradition without parallel in any European country. The aristocrat Tolstoy and the tramp Gorky found that they held certain values and ideas in common, whereas James and Whitman, who between them dominate American writing of the nineteenth century, cannot abide with one another. And theirs is no unique or isolated instance.

The national literature suffers from the ills of a split personality. The typical American writer has so far shown himself incapable of escaping the blight of one-sidedness: of achieving that mature control which permits the balance of impulse with sensitiveness, of natural power with philosophical depth. For the dissociation of mind from experience has resulted in truncated works of art, works that tend to be either naive and ungraded, often flat reproductions of life, or else products of cultivation that remain abstract because they fall short on evidence drawn from the sensuous and material world. Hence it is only through intensively exploiting their very limitations, through submitting themselves to a process of creative yet cruel self-exaggeration, that a few artists have succeeded in warding off the failure that threatened them. And the later novels of Henry James are a case in point.

The palefaces dominated literature throughout the nineteenth century, but in the twentieth they were overthrown by the redskins. Once the continent had been mastered, with the plebeian bourgeoisie coming into complete possession of the national wealth, and puritanism had worn itself out, degenerating into mere respectability, it became objectively possible and socially permissible to satisfy that desire for experience and personal emancipation which heretofore had been systematically frustrated. The era of economic accumulation had ended and the era of consummation had arrived. To enjoy life now became one of the functions of progress—a function for which the palefaces were temperamentally disqualified. This gave Mencken his opportunity to emerge as the ideologue of enjoyment. Novelists like Dreiser, Anderson, and Lewis—and, in fact, most of the writers of the period of “experiment and liberation”—rose against conventions that society itself was beginning to abandon. They helped to “liquidate” the lag between the enormous riches of the nation and its morality of abstention. The neo-

humanists were among the last of the breed of palefaces, and they perished in the quixotic attempt to re-establish the old values. Eliot forsook his native land, while the few palefaces who managed to survive at home took to the academic or else to the "higher" and relatively unpopular forms of writing. But the novelists, who control the main highway of literature, were, and still are, nearly all redskins to the wigwam born.

At present the redskins are in command of the situation, and the literary life in America has seldom been so deficient in intellectual power. The political interests introduced in the nineteen-thirties have not only strengthened their hold but have also brought out their worst tendencies; for the effect of the popular political creeds of our time has been to increase their habitual hostility to ideas, sanctioning the relaxation of standards and justifying the urge to come to terms with semi-literate audiences.

The redskin writer in America is a purely indigenous phenomenon, the true-blue offspring of the western hemisphere, the juvenile in principle and for the good of the soul. He is a self-made writer in the same way that Henry Ford was a self-made millionaire. On the one hand he is a crass materialist, a greedy consumer of experience, and on the other a sentimentalist, a half-baked mystic listening to inward voices and watching for signs and portents. Think of Dreiser, Lewis, Anderson, Wolfe, Sandburg, Caldwell, Steinbeck, Farrell, Saroyan: all writers of genuine and some even of admirable accomplishments, whose faults, however, are not so much literary as faults of raw life itself. Unable to relate himself in any significant manner to the cultural heritage, the redskin writer is always on his own; and since his personality resists growth and change, he must continually repeat himself. His work is ridden by compulsions that depress the literary tradition, because they are compulsions of a kind that put a strain on literature, that literature more often than not can neither assimilate nor sublimate. He is the passive instead of the active agent of the *Zeitgeist*, he lives off it rather than through it, so that when his particular gifts happen to coincide with the mood of the times he seems modern and contemporary, but once the mood has passed he is in danger of being quickly discarded. Lacking the qualities of surprise and renewal, already Dreiser and Anderson, for example, have a "period" air about them that makes a re-reading

of their work something of a critical chore; and one suspects that Hemingway, that perennial boy-man, is more accurately understood as a descendant of Natty Bumppo, the hero of Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking tales, than as the portentously disillusioned character his legend makes him out to be.

As for the paleface, in compensation for backward cultural conditions and a lost religious ethic, he has developed a supreme talent for refinement, just as the Jew, in compensation for adverse social conditions and a lost national independence, has developed a supreme talent for cleverness. (In this connection it is pertinent to recall T. S. Eliot's remark about Boston society, which he described as "quite refined, but refined beyond the point of civilization.") Now this peculiar excess of refinement is to be deplored in an imaginative writer, for it weakens his capacity to cope with experience and induces in him a fetishistic attitude toward tradition; nor is this species of refinement to be equated with the refinement of artists like Proust or Mann, as in them it is not an element contradicting an open and bold confrontation of reality. Yet the paleface, being above all a conscious individual, was frequently able to transcend or to deviate sharply from the norms of his group, and he is to be credited with most of the rigors and charms of the classic American books. While it is true, as John Jay Chapman put it, that his culture is "secondary and tertiary" and that between him and the sky "float the Constitution of the United States and the traditions and forms of English literature"—nevertheless, there exists the poetry of Emily Dickinson, there is *The Scarlet Letter*, there is *Moby Dick*, and there are not a few incomparable narratives by Henry James.

At this point there is no necessity to enter into a discussion of the historical and social causes that account for the disunity of the American creative mind. In various contexts a number of critics have disclosed and evaluated the forces that have worked on this mind and shaped it to their uses. The sole question that seems relevant is whether history will make whole again what it has rent asunder. Will James and Whitman ever be reconciled, will they finally discover and act upon each other? Only history can give a definite reply to this question. In the meantime, however, there are available the resources of effort and understanding, resources which even those who believe in the strict determination of the cultural object need not spurn.

THE CULT OF EXPERIENCE IN AMERICAN WRITING

Every attentive reader of Henry James remembers that highly dramatic scene in *The Ambassadors*—a scene singled out by its author as giving away the “whole case” of his novel—in which Lambert Strether, the elderly New England gentleman who had come to Paris on a mission of business and duty, proclaims his conversion to the doctrine of experience. Caught in the spell of Paris, the discovery of whose grace and form is marked for him by a kind of meaning and intensity that can be likened only to the raptures of a mystic vision, Strether feels moved to renounce publicly the morality of abstention he had brought with him from Woollett, Mass. And that mellow Sunday afternoon, as he mingles with the charming guests assembled in the garden of the sculptor Gloriani, the spell of the world capital of civilization is so strong upon the sensitive old man that he trembles with happiness and zeal. It is then that he communicates to little Bilham his newly acquired piety toward life and the fruits thereof. The worst mistake one can make, he admonishes his youthful interlocutor, is not to live all one can.—“Do what you like so long as you don’t make my mistake . . . Live! . . . It doesn’t so much matter what you do in particular, so long

as you have your life. If you haven't had that, what *have* you had? . . . This place and these impressions . . . have had their abundant message for me, have just dropped *that* into my mind. I see it now . . . and more than you'd believe or I can express . . . The right time is now yours. The right time is any *time* that one is still so lucky as to have . . . Live, Live!"

To an imaginative European, unfamiliar with the prohibitive American past and the long-standing national habit of playing hide and seek with experience, Strether's pronouncements in favor of sheer life may well seem so commonplace as scarcely to be worth the loving concentration of a major novelist. While the idea that one should "live" one's life came to James as a revelation, to the contemporary European writers this idea had long been a thoroughly assimilated and natural assumption. Experience served them as the concrete medium for the testing and creation of values, whereas in James's work it stands for something distilled or selected from the total process of living; it stands for romance, reality, civilization—a self-propelling autonomous "presence" inexhaustibly alluring in its own right. That is the "presence" which in the imagination of Hyacinth Robinson, the hero of *The Princess Casamassima*, takes on a form at once "vast, vague, and dazzling—an irradiation of light from objects undefined, mixed with the atmosphere of Paris and Venice."

The significance of this positive approach to experience and identification of it with life's "treasures, felicities, splendors and successes" is that it represents a momentous break with the then dominant American morality of abstention. The roots of this morality are to be traced on the one hand to the religion of the Puritans and, on the other, to the inescapable need of a frontier society to master its world in sober practice before appropriating it as an object of enjoyment. Such is the historical content of that native "innocence" which in James's fiction is continually being ensnared in the web of European "experience." And James's tendency is to resolve this drama of entanglement by finally accepting what Europe offers on condition that it cleanse itself of its taint of evil through an alliance with New World virtue.

James's attitude toward experience is sometimes overlooked by readers excessively impressed (or depressed) by his oblique methods and effects of remoteness and ambiguity. Actually, from the standpoint of

the history of the national letters, the lesson he taught in *The Ambassadors*, as in many of his other works, must be understood as no less than a revolutionary appeal. It is a veritable declaration of the rights of man—not, to be sure, of the rights of the public, of the social man, but of the rights of the private man, of the rights of personality, whose openness to experience provides the sole effective guaranty of its development. Already in one of his earliest stories we find the observation that “in this country the people have rights but the person has none.” And in so far as any artist can be said to have had a mission, his manifestly was to brace the American individual in his moral struggle to gain for his personal and subjective life that measure of freedom which, as a citizen of a prosperous and democratic community, he had long been enjoying in the sphere of material and political relations.

Strether's appeal, in curiously elaborated, varied, as well as ambivalent forms, pervades all of James's work; and for purposes of critical symbolization it might well be regarded as the compositional key to the whole modern movement in American writing. No literature, it might be said, takes on the qualities of a truly national body of expression unless it is possessed by a basic theme and unifying principle of its own. Thus the German creative mind has in the main been actuated by philosophical interests, the French by the highest ambitions of the intelligence unrestrained by system or dogma, the Russian by the passionately candid questioning and shaping of values. And since Whitman and James the American creative mind, seizing at last upon what had long been denied to it, has found the terms and objects of its activity in the urge toward and immersion in experience. It is this search for experience, conducted on diverse and often conflicting levels of consciousness, which has been the dominant, quintessential theme of the characteristic American literary productions—from *Leaves of Grass* to *Winesburg, Ohio* and beyond; and the more typically American the writer—a figure like Thomas Wolfe is a patent example—the more deeply does it engulf him.

It is through this preoccupation, it seems to me, that one can account, perhaps more adequately than through any other factor, for some of the peculiarities of American writing since the close of its classic period. A basis is thus provided for explaining the unique indifference of this literature to certain cultural aims implicit in the aesthetic rendering of experience—to ideas generally, to theories of value, to the wit of the

speculative and problematical, and to that new-fashioned sense of irony which at once expresses and modulates the conflicts in modern belief. In his own way even a writer as intensely aware as James shares this indifference. He is the analyst of fine consciences, and fine minds too, but scarcely of minds capable of grasping and acting upon those ineluctable problems that enter so prominently and with such significant results into the literary art developed in Europe during the past hundred years. And the question is not whether James belonged among the "great thinkers"—very few novelists do—but whether he is "obsessed" by those universal problems, whether, in other words, his work is vitally associated with that prolonged crisis of the human spirit to which the concept of modernity is ultimately reducible. What James asks for, primarily, is the expansion of life beyond its primitive needs and elementary standards of moral and material utility; and of culture he conceives as the reward of this expansion and as its unfailing means of discrimination. Hence he searches for the whereabouts of "Life" and for the exact conditions of its enrichment. This is what makes for a fundamental difference between the inner movement of the American and that of the European novel, the novel of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Flaubert and Proust, Joyce, Mann, Lawrence, and Kafka, whose problem is invariably posed in terms of life's intrinsic worth and destiny.

The intellectual is the only character missing in the American novel. He may appear in it in his professional capacity—as artist, teacher, or scientist—but very rarely as a person who thinks with his entire being, that is to say, as a person who transforms ideas into actual dramatic motives instead of merely using them as ideological conventions or as theories so externally applied that they can be dispensed with at will. Everything is contained in the American novel except ideas. But what are ideas? At best judgments of reality and at worst substitutes for it. The American novelist's conversion to reality, however, has been so belated that he cannot but be baffled by judgments and vexed by substitutes. Thus his work exhibits a singular pattern consisting, on the one hand, of a disinclination to thought and, on the other, of an intense predilection for the real: and the real appears in it as a vast phenomenology swept by waves of sensation and feeling. In this welter there is little room for the intellect, which in the unconscious belief

of many imaginative Americans is naturally impervious, if not wholly inimical, to reality.

Consider the literary qualities of Ernest Hemingway, for example. There is nothing Hemingway dislikes more than experience of a make-believe, vague, or frigid nature, but in order to safeguard himself against the counterfeit he consistently avoids drawing upon the more abstract resources of the mind, he snubs the thinking man and mostly confines himself to the depiction of life on its physical levels. Of course, his rare mastery of the sensuous element largely compensates for whatever losses he may sustain in other spheres. Yet the fact remains that a good part of his writing leaves us with a sense of situations unresolved and with a picture of human beings tested by values much too simplified to do them justice. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren have recently remarked on the interrelation between qualities of Hemingway's style and his bedazzlement by sheer experience. The following observation in particular tends to bear out the point of view expressed in this essay: "The short simple rhythms, the succession of coordinate clauses, the general lack of subordination—all suggest a dislocated and ununified world. The figures which live in this world live a sort of hand-to-mouth existence perceptually, and conceptually, they hardly live at all. Subordination implies some exercise of discrimination—the sifting of reality through the intellect. But Hemingway has a romantic anti-intellectualism which is to be associated with the premium which he places upon experience as such."*

But Hemingway is only a specific instance. Other writers, less gifted and not so self-sufficiently and incisively one-sided, have come to grief through this same creative psychology. Under its conditioning some of them have produced work so limited to the recording of the unmistakably and recurrently real that it can truly be said of them that their art ends exactly where it should properly begin.

"How can one make the best of one's life?" André Malraux asks in one of his novels. "By converting as wide a range of experience as possible into conscious thought." It is precisely this reply which is alien to the typical American artist, who all too often is so absorbed

* Cf. "The Killers," by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, in *American Prefaces*, Spring 1942.

in experience that he is satisfied to let it "write its own ticket"—to carry him, that is, to its own chance or casual destination.

In the first part of *Faust* Goethe removes his hero, a Gothic dreamer, from the cell of scholastic devotion in order to embroil him in the passions and high-flavored joys of "real life." But in the second part of the play this hero attains a broader stage of consciousness, reconciling the perilous freedom of his newly-released personality with the enduring interests of the race, with high art, politics, and the constructive labor of curbing the chaotic forces in man and nature alike. This progress of Faust is foreshadowed in an early scene, when Mephisto promises to reveal to him "the little and then the great world."—*Wir sehen die kleine, dann die grosse Welt.*—The little world is the world of the individual bemused by his personal experience, and his sufferings, guilt-feelings, and isolation are to be understood as the penalty he pays for throwing off the traditional bonds that once linked him to God and his fellowmen. Beyond the little world, however, lies the broader world of man the inhabitant of his own history, who in truth is always losing his soul in order to gain it. Now the American drama of experience constitutes a kind of half-*Faust*, a play with the first part intact and the second part missing. And the Mephisto of this shortened version is the familiar demon of the Puritan morality-play, not at all the Goethian philosopher-sceptic driven by the nihilistic spirit of the modern epoch. Nor is the plot of this half-*Faust* consistent within itself. For its protagonist, playing Gretchen as often as he plays Faust, is evidently unclear in his own mind as to the role he is cast in—that of the seducer or the seduced?

It may be that this confusion of roles is the inner source of the famous Jamesian ambiguity and ever-recurring theme of betrayal. James's heroines—his Isabel Archers and Milly Theales and Maggie Ververs—are they not somehow always being victimized by the "great world" even as they succeed in mastering it? Gretchen-like in their innocence, they none the less enact the Faustian role in their uninterrupted pursuit of experience and in the use of the truly Mephistophelean gold of their millionaire-fathers to buy up the brains and beauty and nobility of the civilization that enchants them. And the later heroes of American fiction—Hemingway's young man, for instance, who invariably appears in each of his novels, a young man posing his

virility against the background of continents and nations so old that, like Tiresias, they have seen all and suffered all—in his own way he, too, responds to experience in the schizoid fashion of the Gretchen-Faust character. For what is his virility if not at once the measure of his innocence and the measure of his aggression? And what shall we make of Steinbeck's fable of Lennie, that mindless giant who literally kills and gets killed from sheer desire for those soft and lovely things of which fate has singularly deprived him? He combines an unspeakable innocence with an unspeakable aggression. Perhaps it is not too far-fetched to say that in this grotesque creature Steinbeck has unconsciously created a symbolic parody of a figure such as Thomas Wolfe, who likewise crushed in his huge caresses the delicate objects of the art of life.

2

The disunity of American literature, its polar division into above and below or paleface and redskin writing, I have noted elsewhere. Whitman and James, who form a kind of fatal antipodes, have served as the standard examples of this dissociation. There is one sense, however, in which the contrast between these two archetypal Americans may be said to have been overdrawn. There is, after all, a common ground on which they finally, though perhaps briefly, meet—an essential Americanism subsuming them both that is best defined by their mutual affirmation of experience. True, what one affirmed the other was apt to negate; still it is not in their attitudes toward experience as such that the difference between them becomes crucial but rather in their contradictory conceptions of what constitutes experience. One sought its ideal manifestations in America, the other in Europe. Whitman, plunging with characteristic impetuosity into the turbulent, formless life of the frontier and the big cities, accepted experience in its total ungraded state, whereas James, insisting on a precise scrutiny of its origins and conditions, was endlessly discriminatory, thus carrying forward his ascetic inheritance into the very act of reaching out for the charms and felicities of the great European world. But the important thing to keep in mind here is that this plebeian and patrician are historically associated, each in his own incomparable way, in the radical enterprise of subverting

the puritan code of stark utility in the conduct of life and in releasing the long compressed springs of experience in the national letters. In this sense, Whitman and James are the true initiators of the American line of modernity.

If a positive approach to experience is the touchstone of the modern, a negative approach is the touchstone of the classic in American writing. The literature of early America is a sacred rather than a profane literature. Immaculately spiritual at the top and local and anecdotal at the bottom, it is essentially, as the genteel literary historian Barrett Wendell accurately noted, a "record of the national inexperience" marked by "instinctive disregard of actual fact." For this reason it largely left untouched the two chief experiential media—the novel and the drama. Brockden Brown, Cooper, Hawthorne, and Melville were "romancers" rather than novelists. They were incapable of apprehending the vitally new principle of realism by virtue of which the art of fiction in Europe was in their time rapidly evolving toward an hitherto inconceivable condition of objectivity and familiarity with existence. Not until James did a fiction-writer appear in America who was able to sympathise with and hence to take advantage of the methods of Thackeray, Balzac, and Turgenev. Since the principle of realism presupposes a thoroughly secularized relationship between the ego and experience, Hawthorne and Melville could not possibly have apprehended it. Though not religious men themselves, they were nevertheless held in bondage by ancestral conscience and dogma, they were still living in the afterglow of a religious faith that drove the ego, on its external side, to aggrandize itself by accumulating practical sanctions while scourging and inhibiting its intimate side. In Hawthorne the absent or suppressed experience reappears in the shape of spectral beings whose function is to warn, repel, and fascinate. And the unutterable confusion that reigns in some of Melville's narratives (*Pierre*, *Mardi*), and which no amount of critical labor has succeeded in clearing up, is primarily due to his inability either to come to terms with experience or else wholly and finally to reject it.

Despite the featureless innocence and moral-enthusiastic air of the old American books, there is in some of them a peculiar virulence, a feeling of discord that does not easily fit in with the general tone of the classic age. In such worthies as Irving, Cooper, Bryant, Longfellow,

Whittier, and Lowell there is scarcely anything more than meets the eye, but in Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville there is an incandescent symbolism, a meaning within meaning, the vitality of which is perhaps only now being rightly appreciated. D. H. Lawrence was close to the truth when he spoke of what serpents they were, of the "inner diabolism of their underconsciousness." Hawthorne, "that blue-eyed darling," as well as Poe and Melville, insisted on a subversive vision of human nature at the same time as cultivated Americans were everywhere relishing the orations of Emerson who, as James put it, was helping them "to take a picturesque view of one's internal possibilities and to find in the landscape of the soul all sorts of fine sunrise and moonlight effects." Each of these three creative men displays a healthy resistance to the sentimentality and vague idealism of his contemporaries; and along with this resistance they display morbid qualities that, aside from any specific biographical factors, might perhaps be accounted for by the contradiction between the poverty of the experience provided by the society they lived in and the high development of their moral, intellectual, and affective natures—though in Poe's case there is no need to put any stress on his moral character. And the curious thing is that whatever faults their work shows are reversed in later American literature, the weaknesses of which are not to be traced to poverty of experience but to an inability to encompass it on a significant level. ✕

The dilemma that confronted these early writers chiefly manifests itself in their frequent failure to integrate the inner and outer elements of their world so that they might stand witness for each other by way of the organic linkage of object and symbol, act and meaning. For that is the linkage of art without which its structure cannot stand. Lawrence thought that *Moby Dick* is profound *beyond* human feeling—which in a sense says as much against the book as for it. Its further defects are dispersion, a divided mind: its real and transcendental elements do not fully interpenetrate, the creative tension between them is more fortuitous than organic. In *The Scarlet Letter* as in a few of his shorter fictions, and to a lesser degree in *The Blithedale Romance*, Hawthorne was able to achieve an imaginative order that otherwise eluded him. A good deal of his writing, despite his gift for precise observation, consists of phantasy unsupported by the conviction of reality.

Many changes had to take place in America before its spiritual and material levels could fuse in a work of art in a more or less satisfactory manner. Whitman was already in the position to vivify his democratic ethos by an appeal to the physical features of the country, such as the grandeur and variety of its geography, and to the infinite detail of common lives and occupations. And James too, though sometimes forced to resort to makeshift situations, was on the whole successful in setting up a lively and significant exchange between the moral and empiric elements of his subject-matter. Though he was, in a sense, implicitly bound all his life by the morality of Hawthorne, James none the less perceived what the guilt-tossed psyche of the author of *The Marble Faun* prevented him from seeing—that it is not the man trusting himself to experience but the one fleeing from it who suffers the “beast in the jungle” to rend him.

The Transcendentalist movement is peculiar in that it expresses the native tradition of inexperience in its particulars and the revolutionary urge to experience in its generalities. (Perhaps that is what Van Wyck Brooks meant when, long before prostrating himself at his shrine, he wrote that Emerson was habitually abstract where he should be concrete, and vice versa). On a purely theoretical plane, in ways curiously inverted and idealistic, the cult of experience is patently prefigured in Emerson's doctrine of the uniqueness and infinitude, as well as in Thoreau's equal steep estimate, of the private man. American culture was then unprepared for anything more drastic than an affirmation of experience in theory alone, and even the theory was modulated in a semi-clerical fashion so as not to set it in too open an opposition to the dogmatic faith that, despite the decay of its theology, still prevailed in the ethical sphere. “The love which is preached nowadays,” wrote Thoreau, “is an ocean of new milk for a man to swim in. I hear no surf nor surge, but the winds coo over it.” No wonder, then, that Transcendentalism declared itself most clearly and dramatically in the form of the essay—a form in which one can preach without practicing.

3

Personal liberation from social taboos and conventions was the war-cry of the group of writers that came to the fore in the second decade

of the century. They employed a variety of means to formulate and press home this program. Dreiser's tough-minded though somewhat arid naturalism, Anderson's softer and spottier method articulating the protest of shut-in people, Lewis's satires of Main Street, Cabell's florid celebrations of pleasure, Edna Millay's emotional expansiveness, Mencken's worldly wisdom and assaults on the provincial pieties, the early Van Wyck Brook's high-minded though bitter evocations of the inhibited past, his ideal of creative self-fulfillment—all these were weapons brought to bear by the party of rebellion in the struggle to gain free access to experience. And the secret of energy in that struggle seems to have been the longing for what was then called "sexual freedom"; for at the time Americans seeking emancipation were engaged in a truly elemental discovery of sex whose literary expression on some levels, as Randolph Bourne remarked, easily turned into "caricatures of desire." The novel, the poem, the play—all contributed to the development of a complete symptomatology of sexual frustration and release. In his *Memoirs*, written toward the end of his life, Sherwood Anderson recalled the writers of that period as "a little band of soldiers who were going to free life . . . from certain bonds." Not that they wanted to overplay sex, but they did want "to bring it back into real relation to the life we lived and saw others living. We wanted the flesh back in our literature, wanted directly in our literature the fact of men and women in bed together, babies being born. We wanted the terrible importance of the flesh in human relations also revealed again." In retrospect much of this writing seems but a naive inversion of the dear old American innocence, a turning inside out of inbred fear and reticence, but the qualities one likes in it are its positiveness of statement, its zeal and pathos of the limited view.

The concept of experience was then still an undifferentiated whole. But as the desire for personal liberation, even if only from the less compulsive social pressures, was partly gratified and the tone of the literary revival changed from eagerness to disdain, the sense of totality gradually wore itself out. Since the nineteen-twenties a process of atomization of experience has forced each of its spokesmen into a separate groove from which he can step out only at the risk of utterly disorienting himself. Thus, to cite some random examples, poetic technique became the special experience of Ezra Pound, language that of Gertrude Stein,

the concrete object was appropriated by W. C. Williams, super-American phenomena by Sandburg and related nationalists, Kenneth Burke experienced ideas (which is by no means the same as thinking them), Archibald MacLeish experienced public attitudes, F. Scott Fitzgerald the glamor and sadness of the very rich, Hemingway death and virile sports, and so on and so forth. Finally Thomas Wolfe plunged into a chaotic recapitulation of the cult of experience as a whole, traversing it in all directions and ending nowhere.

Though the crisis of the nineteen-thirties arrested somewhat the progress of the experiential mode, it nevertheless managed to put its stamp on the entire social-revolutionary literature of the decade. A comparison of European and American left-wing writing of the same period will at once show that whereas Europeans like Malraux and Silone enter deeply into the meaning of political ideas and beliefs, Americans touch only superficially on such matters, as actually their interest is fixed almost exclusively on the class war as an experience which, to them at least, is new and exciting. They succeed in representing incidents of oppression and revolt, as well as sentimental conversions, but conversions of the heart and mind they merely sketch in on the surface or imply in a gratuitous fashion. (What does a radical novel like *The Grapes of Wrath* contain, from an ideological point of view, that agitational journalism cannot communicate with equal heat and facility. Surely its vogue cannot be explained by its radicalism. Its real attraction for the millions who read it lies elsewhere—perhaps in its vivid recreation of “a slice of life” so horribly unfamiliar that it can be made to yield an exotic interest.) The sympathy of these ostensibly political writers with the revolutionary cause is often genuine, yet their understanding of its inner movement, intricate problems, and doctrinal and strategic motives is so deficient as to call into question their competence to deal with political material. In the complete works of the so-called “proletarian school” you will not find a single viable portrait of a Marxist intellectual or of any character in the revolutionary drama who, conscious of his historical role, is not a mere automaton of spontaneous class force or impulse.

What really happened in the nineteen-thirties is that due to certain events the public aspects of experience appeared more meaningful than its private aspects, and literature responded accordingly. But the subject

of political art is *history*, which stands in the same relation to experience as fiction to biography; and just as surely as failure to generalize the biographical element thwarts the aspirant to fiction, so the ambition of the literary Left to create a political art was thwarted by its failure to life experience to the level of history. (For the benefit of those people who habitually pause to insist on what they call "strictly literary values," I might add that by "history" in this connection I do not mean "history books" or anything resembling what is known as the "historical novel" or drama. A political art would succeed in lifting experience to the level of history if its perception of life—any life—were organized around a perspective relating the artist's sense of the *society* of the dead to his sense of the *society* of the living and the as yet unborn.)

Experience, in the sense of "felt life" rather than as life's total practice, is the main but by no means the total substance of literature. The part experience plays in the aesthetic sphere might well be compared to the part that the materialist conception of history assigns to economy. Experience, in the sense of this analogy, is the substructure of literature above which there rises a superstructure of values, ideas, and judgments—in a word, of the multiple forms of consciousness. But this base and summit are not stationary: they continually act and react upon each other.

It is precisely this superstructural level which is seldom reached by the typical American writer of the modern era. Most of the well-known reputations will bear out my point. Whether you approach a poet like Ezra Pound or novelists like Steinbeck and Faulkner, what is at once noticeable is the uneven, and at time quite distorted, development of the various elements that constitute literary talent. What is so exasperating about Pound's poetry, for example, is its peculiar combination of a finished technique (his special share in the distribution of experience) with amateurish and irresponsible ideas. It could be maintained that for sheer creative power Faulkner is hardly excelled by any living novelist, yet he cannot be compared to Proust or Joyce. The diversity and wonderful intensity of the experience represented in his narratives cannot entirely make up for their lack of order, of a self-illuminating structure, and obscurity of value and meaning. One might naturally counter this criticism by stating that though Faulkner rarely or never sets forth values directly, they none the less exist in his work by implication. Yes, but

implications incoherently expressed are no better than mystifications, and nowadays it is values that we can least afford to take on faith. Moreover, in a more striking manner perhaps than any of his contemporaries, Faulkner illustrates the tendency of the experiential mode, if pursued to its utmost extreme, to turn into its opposite through unconscious self-parody. In Faulkner the excess, the systematic inflation of the horrible is such a parody of experience. In Thomas Wolfe the same effect is produced by his swollen rhetoric and compulsion to repeat himself—and repetition is an obvious form of parody. This repetition-compulsion has plagued a good many American writers. Its first and most conspicuous victim, of course, was Whitman, who occasionally slipped into unintentional parodies of himself.

Yet there is a positive side to the primacy of experience in late American literature. For this primacy has conferred certain benefits upon it, of which none is more bracing than its relative immunity from abstraction and otherworldliness. The stream of life, unimpeded by the rocks and sands of ideology, flows through it freely. If inept in coping with the general, it particularizes not at all badly; and the assumptions of sanctity that so many European artists seem to require as a kind of guaranty of their professional standing are not readily conceded in the lighter and clearer American atmosphere. "Whatever may have been the case in years gone by," Whitman wrote in 1888, "the true use for the imaginative faculty of modern times is to give ultimate vivification to facts, to science, and to common lives, endowing them with glows and glories and final illustriousness which belong to every real thing, and to real things only." As this statement was intended as a prophecy, it is worth noting that while the radiant endowments that Whitman speaks of—the "flows and glories and final illustriousness"—have not been granted, the desired and predicted vivification of facts, science, and common lives has in a measure been realized, though in the process Whitman's democratic faith has as often been belied as confirmed.

4

It is not the mere recoil from the inhibitions of puritan and neo-puritan times that instigated the American search for experience. Behind it is the extreme individualism of a country without a long past to brood

on, whose bourgeois spirit had not worn itself out and been debased in a severe struggle against an old culture so tenacious as to retain the power on occasion to fascinate and render impotent even its predestined enemies. Moreover, in contrast to the derangements that have continually shaken Europe, life in the United States has been relatively fortunate and prosperous. It is possible to speak of American history as "successful" history. Within the limits of the capitalist order—and until the present period the objective basis for a different social order simply did not exist here—the American people have been able to find definitive solutions for the great historical problems that faced them. Thus both the Revolutionary and the Civil War were complete actions that once and for all abolished the antagonisms which had initially caused the breakdown of national equilibrium. In Europe similar actions have usually led to festering compromises that in the end reproduced the same conflicts in other forms.

It is plain that until very recently there has really been no urgent need in America for high intellectual productivity. Indeed, the American intelligentsia developed very slowly as a semi-independent grouping; and what is equally important, for more than a century now and especially since 1865, it has been kept at a distance from the machinery of social and political power. What this means is that insofar as it has been deprived of certain opportunities, it has also been sheltered and pampered. There was no occasion or necessity for the intervention of the intellectuals—it was not mentality that society needed most in order to keep its affairs in order. On the whole the intellectuals were left free to cultivate private interests, and, once the moral and aesthetic ban on certain types of exertion had been removed, uninterruptedly to solicit individual experience. It is this lack of a sense of extremity and many-sided involvement which explains the peculiar shallowness of a good deal of American literary expression. If some conditions of insecurity have been known to retard and disarm the mind, so have some conditions of security. The question is not whether Americans have suffered less than Europeans, but of the quality of whatever suffering and happiness have fallen to their lot.

The consequence of all this has been that American literature has tended to make too much of private life, to impose on it, to scour it for meanings that it cannot always legitimately yield. Henry James was the

first to make a cause, if not a fetish, of personal relations; and the justice of his case, despite his vaunted divergence from the pioneer type, is that of a pioneer too, for while Americans generally were still engaged in "gathering in the preparations and necessities" he resolved to seek out "the amenities and consummations." Furthermore, by exploiting in a fashion altogether his own the contingencies of private life that fell within his scope, he was able to dramatize the relation of the new world to the old, thus driving the wedge of historical consciousness into the very heart of the theme of experience. Later not a few attempts were made to combine experience with consciousness, to achieve the balance of thought and being characteristic of the great traditions of European art. But except for certain narratives of James and Melville, I know of very little American fiction which can unqualifiedly be said to have attained this end.

Since the decline of the regime of gentility many admirable works have been produced, but in the main it is the quantity of felt life comprised in them that satisfies, not their quality of belief or interpretative range. In poetry there is evidence of more distinct gains, perhaps because the medium has reached that late stage in its evolution when its chance of survival depends on its capacity to absorb ideas. The modern poetic styles—metaphysical and symbolist—depend on a conjunction of feeling and idea. But, generally speaking, bare experience is still the *Leitmotif* of the American writer, though the literary depression of recent years tends to show that this theme is virtually exhausted. At bottom it was the theme of the individual transplanted from an old culture taking inventory of himself and of his new surroundings. This inventory, this initial recognition and experiencing of oneself and one's surroundings, is all but complete now, and those who persist in going on it with it are doing so out of mere routine and inertia.

The creative power of the cult of experience is almost spent, but what lies beyond it is still unclear. One thing, however, is certain: whereas in the past, throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, the nature of American literary life was largely determined by national forces, now it is international forces that have begun to exert a dominant influence. And in the long run it is in the terms of this historic change that the future course of American writing will define itself.

THE DARK LADY OF SALEM

Because I seek an image, not a book . . .
—W. B. Yeats

Hawthorne is generally spoken of as a novelist of sin, but the truth is that he is not a novelist, at least not in the sense in which the term is commonly used, nor is sin wholly and unequivocally his subject. What that subject is remains to be defined, though by way of introduction it might be said that it is less a subject than a predicament. Or, better still, the predicament is the subject.

What is the intention of the novel as we have come to know it? In the broadest sense, it is to portray life as it is actually lived. Free access to experience is the necessary condition of the novel's growth as well as the objective guaranty of its significance; experience is at once its myth and its reason; and he who shuns experience is no more capable of a convincing performance in its sphere than a man unnerved by the sight of blood is capable of heroic feats on the battlefield. Now Hawthorne lived in an age when it was precisely experience—or, at any rate, those of its elements most likely to engage the interests of an artist—that was least at the disposal of the imaginative American, whose psychic resistance to its appeal was everywhere reinforced by the newness and bareness of the national scene, by its much-lamented "paucity of ingredi-

ents." It is this privation that accounts for Hawthorne's chill ideality, for his tendency to cherish the fanciful at the expense of the substantial and to reduce the material world to the all-too-familiar abstractions of spiritual law and of the moral conscience. Two strains mingle in his literary nature: the spectral strain of the Gothic tale and the pietistic strain of Christian allegory, and both contribute to his alienation from the real.*

Yet there is in this writer a submerged intensity and passion—a tangled imagery of unrest and longing for experience and regret at its loss which is largely ignored by those of his critics who place him too securely within the family-circle of the New England moralists. His vision of evil carries something more than a simple, one-way assertion of traditional principles; it carries their negation as well. He was haunted not only by the guilt of his desires but also by the guilt of his denial of them. The puritan in him grappled with the man of the nineteenth century—historically a man of appetite and perspective; and the former did not so easily pacify and curb the latter as is generally assumed.

The whole tone and meaning of Hawthorne's work, it seems to me, turns on this conflict.

In his own estimate he was a "romancer," and his insistence on designating himself as such should not be overlooked. Time and again he admonished his readers not to expect from him that "fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's existence" which is the mark of the novelist. He took pains to distinguish between the romance and the novel in order to lay claim, though not without due apologies, to the latitude inherent in the earlier genre. Yet he was fully aware of its deficiencies, aware that the freedom it afforded was more apparent than real, committing him to all sorts of dodges and

* In his *American Prose Masters*, W. C. Brownell observes that Hawthorne's particular genius took him out of the novelist's field altogether. "His novels are not novels. They have not the reality of novels, and they elude it not only in their personages but in their picture of life in general." But the fact is that Hawthorne's particular genius cannot be assessed apart from the forces that shaped its expression. If we accept Brownell's definition of the novel as the medium of the actual, it can be stated flatly that neither Hawthorne nor any of his contemporaries succeeded in mastering it.

retreats to which his artist's conscience could not be reconciled. This explains his habit of referring to his own compositions in a disparaging manner as "fancy-pictures" that could not survive a close comparison with the actual events of real lives.

Even while writing *The Scarlet Letter*, the theme of which suited him perfectly, he publicly regretted the "folly" of flinging himself back into a distant age and attempting to create "a semblance of a world out of airy matter." He would have been far better served, he goes on to confess in that superb essay, *The Custom House*, had he sought his themes in the "warm materiality" of the daily scene. "The fault," he concludes, "was mine. The page of life that was spread out before me seemed dull and commonplace, only because I had not fathomed its deeper import. A better book than I shall ever write was there. . . . At some future day, it may be, I shall remember a few scattered fragments and broken paragraphs, and write them down, and find the letters turn to gold upon the page." But he was fated to be disappointed. The golden flow of reality never suffused his pages. Instead of entering the waking world of the novel, he remained to the last a "romancer" under the spell of that shadowy stuff which he at once loved and hated.

In the development of narrative-prose his place is decidedly among the pre-novelists—a position which he holds not alone but in the company of Poe and Melville and virtually the entire clan of classic American writers who, at one time or another, turned their hand to the making of fiction. The fact is that no novels, properly speaking, were produced in America until late in the nineteenth century, when the moralistic, semi-clerical outlook which had so long dominated the native culture-heroes finally began to give way. The freedom promised by the Transcendentalist movement of the mid-century had not gone beyond a certain philosophical warmth and ardor of purpose. Though this movement expanded American thought, in itself this did not suffice to release the novelistic function. The release was effected only after the Civil War, when the many-sided expansion of American life created a new set of circumstances more favorable to artists whose business is with the concrete manifestations of the real and with its everyday textures. Then it was that James and Howells, susceptible, in different degrees, to the examples of European writing, came forward with new ideas, plans, and recipes.

Hawthorne's isolation from experience incapacitated him as a

novelist. Yet he longed to break through this isolation, searching for the key that would let him out of the dungeon and enable him to "open intercourse with the world." "I have not lived," he cried, "but only dreamed of living. . . . I have seen so little of the world that I have nothing but thin air to concoct my stories of. . . ." Even the moderately candid biographies of him show that such protests were typical of his state of mind. And since these protests also inform his fiction, even if only in a tortuous and contradictory fashion, it can be said that his basic concern as a writer, though expressed in the traditional-moral terms of the problem of sin, was at bottom with the problem of experience—experience, however, not in the sense of its open representation in the manner of a novelist, but simply in the sense of debating its pros and cons, of examining its good and evil, its promise and threat.

This preparatory scrutiny of experience constitutes his real subject, which is obscured by his creative means of allegoric construction and lavish employment of fantasy. His subject and the method he adopted to give it fictional form are incongruously related, but it was the only method available to him in his situation and, despite its faults, it permitted the growth of a novelistic embryo in each of his romances. That which is most actual in his work is comprised in these embryos; the rest—coming under the head of "romance"—is composed by his Gothic machinery and fed by the ceaseless pullulations of the sin-dogma. Knowingly or not, he indicated his own practice in remarking: "Realities keep in the rear, and put forward an advance-guard of show and humbug."

But the split in his emotional and intellectual nature prevented him from ever resolving the conflict of value and impulse implicit in his subject. All he could do is reproduce his predicament within his creations. On the one hand he thought it desirable "to live throughout the whole range of one's faculties and sensibilities" and, on the other, to play the part of a spiritualized Paul Pry "hovering invisible around men and women, witnessing their deeds, searching into their hearts, borrowing brightness from their felicity and shade from their sorrow, *and retaining no emotion peculiar to himself.*" In other words, he wanted the impossible—to enjoy the warmth and vitality of experience without exposing himself to its perils. His entire heritage predisposed him to regard a welcoming and self-offering attitude to experience as the equivalent of a state of sin; and though he was inclined to doubt the justice

and validity of this cruelly schematic equation, its sway over him nevertheless told in the end. It barred him from any patent commitment to that program of personal liberation which his successors in the American creative line were later to adopt and elaborate into peculiarly indigenous forms of literary art. Is experience identical with sin?—and if so, is sin the doom of man or his salvation? To these queries he provided no clear rejoinder, but his bent was to say one thing on the surface of his work, on the level of its manifest content; while saying something else in its depths, in its latent meanings. He tried to serve at once the old and the new gods, and in the main it is within the active play of this ambivalence, of this sundered devotion, that he achieved his unique color and interest. His incubus he taught to poetize.

The constraint under which he labored had its source, of course, in the old Calvinist faith, but he was born too late to know it for what it once was. Of religion, indeed, he knew little beyond its fears. Originally a powerful vision of man's relation to God, the puritan orthodoxy was now reduced to a narrow moral scheme with clerical trappings. And Hawthorne's dilemma was that though the supernatural hardly existed for him in any realm save that of the fanciful, he was none the less unable to free himself from the perception of human destiny in terms of sin and redemption, sacrilege and consecration. The sacramental wine had turned to poison in his cup. His dreams abounded in images of his ancestors rising from their graves and of himself walking down Main Street in a shroud. No wonder, then, that he tended to conceive of the past as a menace to the living, as a force the ghastly fascination of which must be resisted.

The House of the Seven Gables is one long symbolisation of this feeling. "In this age," preaches Holgrave, the young man who stands for the renovation of life, "the moss-grown and rotten Past is to be torn down, and lifeless institutions to be thrust out of the way, and their dead corpses buried, and everything to begin anew. . . . What slaves we are to bygone times—to Death. . . . We live in dead men's houses . . . as in this of the Seven Gables. . . . The house ought to be purified with fire, —purified till only its ashes remain." Still, at the same time as Hawthorne abused the past and remonstrated against its morbid influences, he continued to indulge his taste for gloom and moldiness—for "old ideals and loitering paces and muffled tones." And as the years passed he

yielded more and more to this tendency, with the result that in his last phase his mind faltered—it had lost, as he himself admitted, its fine edge and temper—and he could produce nothing but such fragmentary and essentially pointless allegories as *Septimius Felton* and *The Dolliver Romance*.

The conflict in him is clearly between a newborn secular imagination, as yet untried and therefore permeated with the feeling of shock and guilt, and the moribund religious tradition of old New England. It is a conflict which has seldom been detected by his critics, who have for the most part confounded his inner theme of experience with the all-too-apparent theme of sin. Yet the two themes, regardless of their mutual relation from a theological standpoint, are quite distinct as life-elements—though Hawthorne could not but confuse them. Perhaps it is this that was intuitively sensed by D. H. Lawrence, when he spoke of the duplicity of that “blue-eyed *Wunderkind* of a Nathaniel,” thus construing as double-dealing a double-mindedness the roots of which lie deep in American history. But the melodramatic twist of Lawrence’s insights is scarcely a valid reason for discounting them. He accurately noted the split in Hawthorne between his outward conformity and the “impeccable truth of his art-speech,” between his repressed under-meanings and the moonshiny spirituality of his surface.

The evidence, of course, is in the tales and romances. There is one heroine they bring to life who is possibly the most resplendent and erotically forceful woman in American fiction. She dominates all the other characters because she alone personifies the contrary values that her author attached to experience. Drawn on a scale larger than reality, she is essentially a mythic being, the incarnation of hidden longings and desires, as beautiful, we are repeatedly told, as she is “inexpressibly terrible,” a temptress offering the ascetic sons of the puritans the “treasure-trove of a great sin.”

We come to know this dark lady under four different names—as Beatrice in the story *Rappaccini’s Daughter*, Hester in *The Scarlet Letter*, Zenobia in *The Blithedale Romance*, and Miriam in *The Marble Faun*. Her unity as a character is established by the fact that in each of her four appearances she exhibits the same physical and mental qualities

and plays substantially the same role. Hawthorne's description of her is wonderfully expressive in the fullness of its sensual imaginings. He is ingenious in devising occasions for celebrating her beauty, and conversely, for denigrating, albeit in equivocal language, her blonde rival—the dove-like, virginal, snow-white maiden of New England. But the two women stand to each other in the relation of the damned to the saved, so that inevitably the dark lady comes to a bad end while the blonde is awarded all the prizes—husband, love, and absolute exemption from moral guilt. There is obviously an obsessive interest here in the psychosexual polarity of dark and fair with its symbolism of good and evil—a polarity which in Fenimore Cooper's treatment (in *The Last of the Mohicans* and *The Deerslayer*) is little more than a romantic convention but which both in Hawthorne and in Melville (Hautia and Yillah in *Mardi* and Isabel and Lucy in *Pierre*) acquires a newly intensive meaning.

Beatrice, of *Rappaccini's Daughter*, is as luxuriant as any of the gem-like flowers in her father's garden of poisonous plants. She looks "redundant with life, health, and energy . . . beautiful as the day, with a bloom so deep and vivid that one shade more would have been too much"; her voice, "rich as a tropical sunset," makes her lover Giovanni "think of deep hues of purple or crimson and of perfumes heavily delectable." Hester, of *The Scarlet Letter*, is "tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam, and a face which besides being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow. . . . She had in her nature a rich, voluptuous, Oriental characteristic." In the redundancy of her charms Zenobia, of *The Blithedale Romance*, is fully the equal of Hester Prynne. "Zenobia was an admirable . . . a magnificent figure of a woman, just on the hither verge of her maturity . . . her hand, though very soft, was larger than most women would like to have . . . though not a whit too large in proportion with the spacious plan of her development . . . the native glow of coloring in her cheeks, and even the flesh-warmth of her round arms, and what was visible of her full bust—in a word, her womanliness incarnate—compelled me sometimes to close my eyes. . . . One felt an influence breathing out of her such as we might suppose to come from Eve, when she was just made . . . a

certain warm and rich characteristic . . . the whole woman was alive with a passionate intensity in which her beauty culminated. Any passion would have become her well; and passionate love, perhaps, best of all." And Miriam, of *The Marble Faun*, also had "a great deal of color in her nature . . . a beautiful woman . . . with dark eyes . . . black, abundant hair . . . a dark glory."

It is plain that the physical characteristics of these four heroines are interchangeable, and this cannot be due to poverty of invention on Hawthorne's part. What it suggests, rather, is a strong fixation on a certain type of woman, in every way the opposite of the sexually anesthetic females to whom he officially paid homage.* The dark lady is above all an ambivalent love-object**; but beyond that she makes visible that desire for an open-handed conduct of life and individual fulfilment which was in later years to become the major concern of American writing. Reduced to more realistic proportions but none the less still invested with mythic powers, she reappears, in such novels as Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter* and *Many Marriages*, in the part of the ideal love-partner for whom thwarted husbands desert their wives; and a character like Hemingway's Maria (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*)—likewise not a "real" person but a dream-image of sexual bliss—is clearly in her line of descent. In her latter-day mutations, however, the sinister side of this heroine has been obliterated. She is now wholly affirmed.

* In this connection a revealing passage from W. D. Howells' *Literary Friends and Acquaintance* is worth citing. Howells is telling of his first meeting with Hawthorne in 1860: "With the abrupt transition of his talk throughout, he [Hawthorne] began to speak of women, and said he had never seen a woman whom he thought quite beautiful. In the same way he spoke of the New England temperament, and suggested that the apparent coldness in it was also real, and that the suppression of emotion for generations would extinguish it at last." Psychologically speaking, the second remark might be taken as a sufficient explanation of the first. On the other hand, perhaps Hawthorne meant to say that no woman he had ever met in the flesh was quite as resplendent as his imagined dark lady.

** Her type is not unknown of course in Victorian fiction, from Trollope to Hardy. She also enters the folklore of the Anglo-Saxon countries as the villainous 'dark vampire' of the early American films and popular romances. It is interesting to note that in the 1920's the glamorous (the 'hot') blonde replaces the mysterious and voluptuous brunette as the carrier of the sexually potent and dangerous. In Anita Loos' *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* the usurpation has already gone so far that it is taken for granted. This reversal of roles may well be due to the newly-won sexual freedom of the post-war era, a freedom which brought the sexual element to the light of day and thus ended its hitherto exclusive identification with the secrets of the night.

But insofar as they no longer threaten us, these idealized modern women have also ceased to be thoughtful. The Anderson and Hemingway girls leave us without any distinct impression of their minds, whereas the dark lady of Salem displays mental powers that are the counterpart of her physical vitality. Invariably she dominates, or seeks to dominate, the men she loves, and her intellectual range equals and at times even exceeds theirs. She not only acts but thinks passionately, solving the problem of the relation between the sexes in a radical fashion and subverting established values and standards. After being cast out by the community, Hester, we are told, "assumed a freedom of speculation . . . which our forefathers, had they known it, would have held to be a deadlier crime than that stigmatized by the scarlet letter"; Zenobia, who is something of a litterateur and a crusader for women's rights,* has an aptitude for extreme ideas that fill her interlocutors with dismay; and Miriam evolves a conception of sin which amounts to a justification, for she takes the view that sin is a means of educating and improving the personality.

The dark lady is a rebel and an emancipator; but precisely for this reason Hawthorne feels the compulsion to destroy her. *He thus converts the principle of life, of experience, into a principle of death.* Incessantly haunted by the wrongs of the past, by the memory of such brutal deeds directly implicating the founders of his family as the witchcraft-trials and the oppression of the Quakers, this repentant puritan is nevertheless impelled by an irresistible inner need to reproduce the very same ancestral pattern in his work. Roused by long-forgotten fears and superstitions, he again traces the footprints of the devil and hears demonic laughter in the woods as darkness falls. His story of the dark lady renews, in all essentials, the persecution of the Salem witches. Beatrice is "as lovely as the dawn and gorgeous as the sunset," yet the "rich perfume of her breath blasts the very air" and to embrace her is to die. Passionate love becomes Zenobia best, yet through insinuating symbols she is pictured as a sorceress. She wears an exotic flower in her hair, and perhaps if this talismanic flower were snatched away she would "vanish or be

* This is the basis of the widespread impression that she is modelled after Margaret Fuller. Henry James thought there was no truth in the legend. Hawthorne's references to the Boston sibyl in his notebooks are uniformly unkind; he describes her as devoid of the "charm of womanhood" and as a "great humbug" to boot.

transformed into something else." Miriam, too, has the "faculty of bewitching people." When her nerves give way and she fancies herself unseen, she seeks relief in "fits of madness horrible to behold." Such is the twice-told tale of the dark lady. The victim, in her earlier incarnations, of grim black-browed puritan magistrates, she is now searched out by a secluded New England author who condemns her because she coerces his imagination.

Her figure is first evoked by Hawthorne in *Rappaccini's Daughter* (1844), an entirely fantastic tale generally ranked among the most brilliantly effective of his earlier writings. Beatrice is the daughter of a malignant old professor, who, in his search of fearsome secrets, is experimenting with the medicinal properties of poisonous plants. On coming to Padua, the student Giovanni rents a room the window of which overlooks Rappaccini's garden. Though unaware of the real nature of the flowers in this garden, he is at once troubled by their strange and rampant bloom.—"The aspect of one and all of them dissatisfied him; their gorgeousness seemed fierce, passionate, and even unnatural. There was hardly an individual shrub which a wanderer, straying by himself through a forest, would not have been startled to find growing wild, as if an unearthly face had glared at him out of the thicket." His initial impression of Beatrice is that she is but another flower—"the human sister of these vegetable ones, as beautiful as they, more beautiful than the richest of them, but still to be touched only with a glove, nor to be approached without a mask"; and when night closes in, he dreams of a rich flower and a lovely girl. "Flower and maiden were different and yet the same, and fraught with some peculiar peril in either shape." In time, as Giovanni ventures into the garden, he learns that the flowers are deadly. But he is now in love with Beatrice and tormented by the suspicion that she possesses the same fatal attributes. Can such dreadful peculiarities in her physical nature exist, he asks himself, without some corresponding "monstrosity of soul?" The day comes when after many tests he is at last sure that not only is she poisonous but that she had begun to instil her poison into his system. He procures an antidote which he forces her to drink. But it is too late to save her, for "so radically had her earthly part been wrought upon by Rappaccini's skill, that

as poison had been her life, so the powerful antidote was death; and thus the poor victim of man's ingenuity and of thwarted nature . . . perished there, at the feet of her father and Giovanni."

No summary can give an adequate sense of the exotic light in which this story is drenched, nor of the extravagantly erotic associations of its imagery. It opens with the 'peephole' motif, so typical of Hawthorne. ("Sometimes through a peephole I have caught a glimpse of the real world . . ." he wrote to Longfellow.) At first it is only from the outside—through a window—that Giovanni dares to peer into this "Eden of poisonous flowers," which Freudians would have no trouble at all translating into a garden of genitalia. But whether interpreted in a Freudian manner or not, its mystery is easily unraveled. What is this Eden if not the garden of experience, of the knowledge of good and evil. Giovanni is tempted to enter it, only to discover that its gorgeous flowers are emblems of sin and that the gorgeous Beatrice embodies all that is forbidden. She has succeeded in enticing him into a "region of unspeakable horror," but it is she who is doomed, while he, being innocent, escapes. The wages of sin is death.

To be sure, there are other readings of this story. The traditional one simply takes at face value Hawthorne's stated intention, his 'message' warning against such unscrupulous love of power and knowledge as is manifested in Rappaccini. The old professor, who is a shadow character, is thus put in the foreground, while Beatrice, who is the real protagonist, is reduced to the role of a mere passive victim of her father's monomaniacal ambition. Needless to say, this approach ignores the story's specific content for the sake of its abstract and, it should be remarked, utterly commonplace moral. It fails to account for the mystic sensuality, the hallucinated atmosphere, and the intertwining symbolism of flower and maiden. No, this business of the wizard Rappaccini and his poisons is just so much flummery and Gothic sleight-of-hand. Its use is that of an "alibi" for the author, who transforms Beatrice into a monster in order to punish her for tempting Giovanni. Actually it is her beauty that Hawthorne cannot forgive her.

The flower-symbolism of this tale is repeated in the later romances of the dark lady. So resplendent is the scarlet token of shame worn by Hester Prynne that it might well be a flower in Rappaccini's garden formed to spell the letter A. ("On the breast of her gown, in fine red

cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, there appeared the letter A. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy. . . .") And, again, much is made in *The Blithedale Romance* of the single flower that adorns Zenobia's hair.—"It was a hot-house flower, an outlandish flower, a flower of the tropics, such as appeared to have sprung passionately from a soil the very weeds of which would be fervid and spicy . . . so brilliant, so rare, so costly. . . ." It is manifestly a flower of a preternatural order, a kind of *mana*-object, an instrument of magic and witches' work.

As compared to the subsequent full-length versions of the same theme, the story of Beatrice is but a primitive fantasy. There is a gap between *Rappaccini's Daughter* and *The Scarlet Letter*, which was written six years later and which is the most truly novelistic of Hawthorne's romances. Its concrete historical setting gives it greater density of material and sharpness of outline; and largely because of this gain in reality, Hester Prynne is the least symbolically overladen and distorted of the four heroines who share in the character of the dark lady. There is nothing satanic about her motives and she is the only one who, far from being ultimately spurned, is justified instead.

There are ambiguities in *The Scarlet Letter*, as in all of Hawthorne, yet it is possible to say that it represents his furthest advance in affirming the rights of the individual. Known as a story of the expiation of a sin, it is quite as much an analysis of this sin as a "kind of typical illusion." It is the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale, his brain reeling from ghostly visions, who in his repentance plies a bloody scourge on his own shoulders; Hester, on the other hand, is ready to reject the puritan morality altogether, to make a clean sweep of the past and to escape from the settlement in order to fulfill her love without shame or fear. Her pariah-status in the community is not productive of remorse and humility. On the contrary, we are told that "standing alone in the world . . . the world's law was no law for her mind. . . . In her lonesome cottage, by the seashore, thoughts visited her, such as dared enter no other dwelling in New England."

This is best shown in Chapters XVII and XVIII of the novel when Hester finally persuades the minister that the only way he could rid himself of Chillingworth's persecution is to desert his congregation and

return to England. At first he thinks that she bids him go alone, whereupon he protests that he has not the strength or courage to embark on such a venture. At this point she reveals her plan, proving that she does not recognize her guilt, that for her nothing has changed, that in fact "the whole seven years of outlawry and ignominy had been little other than a preparation for this very hour."—But some of the passages that follow are worth quoting at length.

He repeated the word.

"Alone, Hester!"

"Thou shalt not go alone!" answered she, in a deep whisper.

Then all was spoken!

Arthur Dimmesdale gazed into Hester's face with a look in which hope and joy shone out, indeed, but with fear between them, and a kind of horror at her boldness, who had spoken what he vaguely hinted at but dared not speak.

But Hester Prynne, with a mind of native courage and activity, and for so long a period not merely estranged, but outlawed from society, had habituated herself to such latitude of speculation as was altogether foreign to the clergyman. . . . For years past she had looked from this estranged point of view at human institutions, and whatever priests or legislators had established. . . . The tendency of her fate has been to set her free.

"Thou wilt go," said Hester, calmly, as he met her glance.

The decision once made, a glow of strange enjoyment threw its flickering brightness over the trouble of his breast. It was the exhilarating effect—upon a prisoner just escaped from the dungeon of his own heart—of breathing the wild, free atmosphere of an unredeemed, unchristianized, lawless region. . . .

"Do I feel joy again?" cried he, wondering at himself. "Methinks the germ of it was dead in me! O, Hester, thou art my better angel! I seem to have flung myself—sick, sin-stained, and sorrow-blackened—down upon these forest-leaves, and to have risen up all made anew, and with new powers to glorify Him that hath been merciful! This is already the better life. Why did we not find it sooner?"

"Let us not look back," answered Hester Prynne. "The past is gone! . . . See! With this symbol I undo it all, and make it as it had never been!"

So speaking, she undid the clasp that fastened the scarlet letter, and taking it from her bosom, threw it to a distance among the withered leaves. . . . The stigma gone, Hester heaved a deep, long sigh, in which the burden of shame and anguish departed from her spirit. O exquisite relief! . . . By another impulse she took off the formal cap that confined her hair; and down it fell upon her shoulders, dark and

rich. . . . There played around her mouth and beamed out of her eyes, a radiant and tender smile, that seemed gushing from the very heart of womanhood. A crimson flush was glowing on her cheeks, that had been long so pale. Her sex, her youth, and the whole richness of her beauty, came back from what men call the irrevocable past, and clustered themselves, with her maiden hope and a happiness before unknown, within the magic circle of this hour.

This unregenerate temptress knows her power, but in the end Dimmesdale cheats her of her triumph by publicly confessing his sin on the scaffold; and that, of course, is *his* triumph. This thin-skinned clergyman is the ancestor of all those characters in Henry James who invent excruciatingly subtle reasons for renouncing their heart's desire once they are on the verge of attaining it. But in James there are also other characters, who, while preserving Dimmesdale's complex qualities of conscience and sensibility, finally do succeed in overcoming this tendency to renunciation. Lambert Strether of *The Ambassadors* and Milly Theale of *The Wings of the Dove*, whose ideal aim is "to achieve a sense of having lived," are plainly cases of reaction against Hawthorne's plaint: "I have not lived but only dreamed of living!"

This link with James is further evidence that, though in no position to show his hand and not even fully conscious of what was at stake, Hawthorne dealt with the problem of sin mainly insofar as it served him as a mold for the problem of experience. It is difficult to believe in the sins committed by his characters for the simple reason that he hardly believes in them himself. Consider how he stacks the cards, how he continually brings up extenuating circumstances and even lapses into tell-tale defensive statements, so that before long we cannot but lose the conviction of evil and corruption. Who, actually, are his sinners? The minor figures cannot, of course, be taken into account in this respect, for, like Chillingsworth, Westervelt, Miriam's model and even Judge Pyncheon, they are nothing more than conventional villains, and at that most of them are so unreal that their conduct is of little consequence. It is only the protagonists, then, who count. But of these, with the exception of Dimmesdale, there is scarcely one who can be objectively regarded as a wrongdoer. Among the women only Hester's guilt is definitely established, yet even she is shown to have so many rights on her side that it is impossible to see in her anything more portentous than a violator of the communal *mores*. It is not, however, by their flouting of the com-

munal *mores* that we judge the great transgressors pictured in literature. These big biters into the apple inevitably sin against the Holy Ghost.

Zenobia and Miriam wholly exemplify Hawthorne's bias against the dark lady, a bias which, instead of being supported and objectified by a credible presentation of her misdeeds, is limited in its expression to atmospheric effects, insinuations, and rumors. He wants to destroy the dark lady at the same time that he wants to glorify her; hence his indictment of her is never really driven home. This divided intention cannot but impair the dramatic structures of *The Blithedale Romance* and *The Marble Faun*, and these two narratives are in fact much inferior to *The Scarlet Letter*.

But the *Romance*, with its marvelous sense of place and weather and with its contrasted tableaux of town and country, has a unique appeal of its own. Both James and Lawrence have testified to its attraction. The former speaks of it as "leaving in the memory an impression analogous to that of an April day—an alternation of brightness and shadow, of broken sun-patches and sprinkling clouds." James also thought that in Zenobia Hawthorne made his nearest approach to the complete creation of a character. But this vivid brunette is treated with much less sympathy than Hester—and perhaps the reason is that since she exerts greater sexual power she must needs be subjected to firmer measures of control. At any rate, his attitude toward her is markedly more subjective, and this note of subjectivity is one of the charms of the *Romance*, the unflinching charm of the confessional tone and of the personal modulation. The story is told through a narrator by the name of Miles Coverdale, a minor Boston poet in whom one easily discerns many features of the author.

No sooner does Coverdale come upon Zenobia in Blithedale—a Utopian colony inhabited by a "little army of saints and martyrs"—than her beauty moves him to rhapsodic appreciation; he is in a fever of susceptibility, and the very next day a fit of sickness lays him low. His illness and exhaustion render him even more sensitive—morbidly so—to what he calls "Zenobia's sphere." (What a master stroke, this episode of Coverdale's illness, with its suggestions of a rite of passage from one mode of life to another!) Obviously infatuated with her, he is not the

man to submit to such a feeling. By what is plainly a psychological detour—analysts would see in it an example of protective displacement—he persuades himself that his real attachment is to Zenobia's half-sister, the mediumistic, shadowy snow-maiden who is the Prissy of the tale. This convenient self-deception permits him to covet Zenobia and to pry into her affairs without in any way committing himself to her—for how could he, a paleface poet with overcharged scruples, make up to a woman who is "passionate, luxurious, lacking simplicity, not deeply refined, incapable of pure and perfect taste?" Moreover, as if to spare him further trouble, both females fall in love not with him but with the fanatical reformer Hollingsworth, who is a mere stick of a character, a travesty as a reformer and even worse travesty as a lover. The emotional economy of this story is throughout one of displacement. It is evident on every page that the only genuine relationship is that of Coverdale to Zenobia; the rest is mystification. But the whole point of Coverdale's behavior is to avoid involvement. As Zenobia tells him in one of the final bang-up scenes, his real game is "to grope for human emotions in the dark corners of the heart"—strictly in the hearts of other people, to be sure. He plays perfectly the role of the ideal Paul Pry that Hawthorne envisaged for himself in the earlier passages of his journals.

Though vowing that he adores the ethereal Priscilla, Coverdale is nevertheless quite adept at belittling her by means of invidious comparisons that strike home despite their seemingly general reference. Some finicky people, he reflects after his first encounter with Zenobia, might consider her wanting in softness and delicacy, but the truth is that "we find enough of these attributes everywhere; preferable . . . was Zenobia's bloom, health, and vigor, which she possessed in such overflow that a man might well have fallen in love with her for their sake only." And again: "We seldom meet with women nowadays, and in this country, who impress us as being women at all;—their sex fades away and goes for nothing . . . a certain warm and rich characteristic seems to have been refined away out of the feminine system." Finally, in view of these frequent digs at Prissy, there can be no doubt that Westervelt, the villain of the piece, is really speaking for Coverdale when he describes her as "one of those delicate, young creatures, not uncommon in New England, and whom I suppose to have become what we find them by the gradual refining away of the physical system among your women. Some philoso-

phers choose to glorify this habit of body by terming it spiritual; but in my opinion, it is rather the effect of unwholesome food, bad air, lack of outdoor exercise, and neglect of bathing, on the part of these damsels and their female progenitors, all resulting in a kind of hereditary dyspepsia. Zenobia, with her uncomfortable surplus of vitality, is far the better model of womanhood."

But this "better model of womanhood" commits suicide for want of love, while the obstreperous Hollingsworth is collared by Prissy and dragged to the altar. The puritan morality of predestination takes its toll as the story closes. Humanity is divided into the damned and the saved, irretrievably so, and never the twain shall meet. Yet the *Romance*, despite its mechanically enforced moral lessons, stands out among Hawthorne's works for its outspokenness and for its bold and free characterization of Coverdale and Zenobia. In its painful doubleness, in its feeling of combined attraction and repulsion, the relationship between these two characters is one of the most meaningful and seminal in American literature. It is intrinsically the relationship between New England and the world, and again the connection with James comes to mind. Zenobia can be understood as an earlier and cruder version of Madame de Vionnet (of *The Ambassadors*), whose worldly motives and passionate nature Lambert Strether finally comes to understand and to accept; and Coverdale, too, is reproduced in James, and not in one type alone. One recognizes his kinship with Strether, who has overcome the obsession with sin and is priming himself to enter forbidden territory, no less than with such a curious figure as the spying, eavesdropping protagonist of *The Sacred Fount*, whose neurotic fear and envy of life find an outlet in a mania of snooping and prying into the lives of his neighbors. In this nameless Jamesian snoop the 'peephole' motif reaches its culmination: it has become his medium of existence and his intellectual rationale besides.

In *The Marble Faun* Hawthorne resumes his story of the dark lady, and his attitude to her is now formulated in more logical terms. The conception of sin as an "instrument most effective in the education of intellect and soul" is openly expounded and affirmed by Miriam, whereas the snow-maiden Hilda, who is a purist and perfectionist, defends to the last old puritan ethic. What Miriam advocates is the right of the personality to that self-knowledge and self-development which only the process of experience can provide. But she too, like Hester, is in the end

sentenced by the author to life-long suffering and expiation of her sin. Unlike Hester's sin, however, Miriam's is utterly chimerical, fabricated out of the whole cloth by the Gothic machinery of horror; what alone is real is her defiance of the ancestral taboos.

The part of the male evildoer in *The Marble Faun* is taken by Donatello, the innocent, faun-like, quasi-mythical Italian who is drawn by Miriam to commit a crime and is thus brought within the confines of "sinful, sorrowful mentality." It is the story, of course, of the fall of man, with the dark lady cast in the dual role of Eve and the serpent. Hilda and the sculptor Kenyon are the onlookers and commentators on the action. Presented as models of virtue, they are actually an insufferable pair of prigs, especially Hilda, who is in fact one of the grimmest figures in Hawthorne, despite all the proper talk about her dove-like nature. Symbolically enough, this militant virgin dwells in a tower which is continually referred to as the "young girl's eyerie," and from this high vantage-point she surveys the conduct of mankind with the self-assurance of a moral millionaire. The sculptor, to be sure, tends to sympathize with Miriam, but Hilda never fails to pull him up short. The whole issue is summed up perfectly in the following dialogue between them:

"Ah, Hilda," said Kenyon, "you do not know, for you could never learn it from your own heart, which is all purity and rectitude, what a mixture of good and evil there may be in things evil; and how the greatest criminal, if you look at his conduct from his own point of view, or from any side-point, may seem not so unquestionably guilty, after all. So with Miriam, so with Donatello. They are, perhaps, partners in what we must call awful guilt; and yet, I will own to you,—when I think of the original cause, the motives, the feelings, the sudden concurrence of circumstances thrusting them onward, the urgency of the moment, and the sublime unselfishness on either part,—I know not well how to distinguish it from much that the world calls heroism. Might we not render some such verdict as this?—'Worthy of Death, but not unworthy of Love!'"

"Never!" answered Hilda, looking at the matter through the clear crystal medium of her own integrity. "This thing, as regards its causes, is all a mystery to me, and must remain so. But there is, I believe, only one right and only one wrong; and I do not understand, and may God keep me from understanding, how two things so totally unlike can be mistaken for one another; nor how two mortal foes, such as Right and Wrong surely are, can work together in the same deed. . . ."

"Alas for human nature, then!" said Kenyon, sadly. . . . "I have always felt you, my dear friend, a terribly severe judge, and have been perplexed to conceive how such tender sympathy could coexist with the remorselessness of a steel blade. You need no mercy, and therefore know not how to show any."

"That sounds like a bitter gibe," said Hilda, with the tears springing to her eyes. "But I cannot help it. It does not alter my perception of the truth. If there be any such dreadful mixture as you affirm—and which appears to me almost more shocking than pure evil,—then the good is turned to poison, not the evil to wholesomeness."

It is against such pharisaical moralism as Hilda displays that Hawthorne reacted in creating the figure of the dark lady, yet he could never muster the resolution to repudiate Hilda openly. Hence the dark lady, too, is inevitably stricken down by the same minatory code. Miriam pleads that the crime joining her to Donatello was "a blessing in disguise" in that it brought "a simple and imperfect nature to a point of feeling and intelligence which it could have reached under no other discipline." But her pleas are of no avail—in the end she is destroyed. And how illusory is the crime of which she is accused, with its horror-romanticism of the murder of a timeless wizard who has in some inexplicable way gained an ascendancy over her. And this in what is presumably a serious novel of crime and punishment! One might claim, of course, that the failure of actuality at this crucial turn of the plot is nothing more than a defect in the story-teller's art, a carryover from the obsolescent Gothic technique. But it is precisely Hawthorne's persistent reliance on this technique which is so revealing of his real situation. It seems to me that he is unable to authenticate Miriam's guilt for the quite obvious reason that her beauty and love of life already sufficiently condemn her in his eyes. In other words, it is not her deeds but her very existence which is the supreme provocation and the supreme crime.

The critics of the school of 'original sin' have for some years now tried to present Hawthorne as a kind of puritan Dostoevsky. But this comparison will not stand the test of analysis. In their eagerness to make ideological capital out of Hawthorne's "traditionalism," these critics overlook one vital distinction: whereas in Dostoevsky's case the awareness of sin flows from a mighty effort to regain a metaphysical and religious consciousness, in Hawthorne this awareness is at the point of

dissolution. What is behind it is no genuine moral passion nor a revival of dogma but a fear of life induced by narrow circumstances and morbid memories of the past. The faith of his forefathers had lost its rational appeal, yet psychologically it still ruled and confined him. Hence the inherited beliefs appear in his work as spectres rather than as convictions.

A literature of sin is most naturally developed in a society suffering from a surfeit of experience—an excess which it cannot control because of a derangement of values. This was the condition of Russian society in Dostoevsky's time; and it is with this unlimited availability of experience, amounting almost to anarchy, which enabled the Russian novelist to materialize his themes of sin and evil. We believe in the sins of Stavrogin, Raskolnikov, and the Karamazovs because they are actualized within the experiential realm, the only realm in which significant actions can be truly confirmed. Now if regarded from this point of view, the American romancer must be placed at the opposite pole from the Russian novelist. The society to which he belonged suffered not from a surfeit but from poverty of experience; and, far from being too fluid, its values were altogether too rigid. His problem was simpler than Dostoevsky's as well as radically different in nature. It was not an exceptional but necessarily a typical problem—typical, despite all variations, of America's creative writers in the nineteenth century and in the early decades of the twentieth. It can be defined as the problem of the re-conquest, of the re-acquisition of experience in its cultural, aesthetic, and, above all, subjective aspects. For this is the species of experience which had gradually been lost to the migrant European man in the process of subjugating and settling the new world.

Van Wyck Brooks has described Hawthorne as the "most deeply planted of American writers." But this is true only in the sense that he is the most deeply and vividly local. He rifled the hive of New England honey, but he was quite indifferent to the wider ranges of the national scene. His is the "sweet flavor," to use one of his own similes, of "a frost-bitten apple, such as one picks up under the tree in December." It is the chill yet mellow flavor of the Salem centuries. On this side of him he indeed sums up and closes the puritan cycle; but from another angle of vision he can be seen to be precursive of the later and more positive interests of American letters. Times past are mirrored in the dark lady's harsh fate, yet in her mystic sensuality she speaks of things to come.

THE HEIRESS OF ALL THE AGES

Henry James is not fully represented in his novels by any one single character, but of his principal heroine it can be said that she makes the most of his vision and dominates his drama of transatlantic relations. This young woman is his favorite American type, appearing in his work time and again under various names and in various situations that can be taken as so many stages in her career. Hence it is in the line of her development that we must study her. Her case involves a principle of growth which is not to be completely grasped until she has assumed her final shape.

This heroine, too, is cast in the role, so generic to James, of the "passionate pilgrim," whose ordinary features are those of the "good American bewildered in presence of the European order." But bewilderment is not a lasting motive in this heroine's conduct; unlike most of her fellow-pilgrims in James's novels, she soon learns how to adjust European attitudes to the needs of her personality. Where she excels is in her capacity to plunge into experience without paying the usual Jamesian penalty for such daring—the penalty being either the loss of one's moral balance or the recoil into a state of aggrieved innocence. She responds "magnificently" to the beauty of the old-world scene even while keeping a tight

hold on her native virtue: the ethical stamina, good will, and inwardness of her own provincial background. And thus living up to her author's idea both of Europe and America, she is able to mediate, if not wholly to resolve, the conflict between the two cultures, between innocence and experience, between the sectarian code of the fathers and the more 'civilized' though also more devious and dangerous code of the lovers. No wonder James commends her in terms that fairly bristle with heroic intentions and that in the preface to *The Wings of the Dove* he goes so far as to credit her with the great historic boon of being "that certain sort of young American," exceptionally endowed with "liberty of action, of choice, of appreciation, of contact . . . who is more the 'heir of all the ages' than any other young person whatsoever."

If James's relation to his native land is in question, then more is to be learned from this young woman's career than from any number of discursive statements quoted from his letters, essays, and autobiographies. "It's a complete fate being an American," he wrote. Yes, but what does this fate actually come to in his work? The answer, it seems to me, is mostly given in his serial narrative of the heiress of all the ages.

The initial assignment of this heroine is to reconnoiter the scene rather than take possession of it. As yet she is not recognized as the legitimate heiress but merely as a candidate for the inheritance. Such is the part played by Mary Garland, for instance, a small-town girl from New England who herself feels the pull of the "great world" even as she tries to save her errant lover from its perils (*Roderick Hudson*, 1875). Daisy Miller, a young lady whose friends are distressed by the odd mixture of spontaneous grace, audacity, and puerility in her deportment, is also cast in this role, though with somewhat special and limited intentions. Bessie Alden (*An International Episode*, 1878), a more cultivated and socially entrenched figure than the famous Daisy, voyages to England—inevitably so—for the sake of enjoying its picturesque associations; and she is noteworthy as the first of the James girls to reap the triumph of turning down the proposal of an old-world aristocrat. But it is in Isabel Archer (*The Portrait of a Lady*) that we first encounter this heroine in a truly pivotal position, comprising the dramatic consequences of a conflict not merely of manners but of morals as well. In Isabel her heretofore scattered traits are unified and corrected in the light of James's

growing recognition of the importance of her claims. Two decades later, at the time when his writing had settled into the so portentously complex style of his ultimate period, she reappears as the masterful though stricken Milly Theale of *The Wings of the Dove* and as the impeccable Maggie Verver of *The Golden Bowl*, to whom all shall be given. These last displays of her are by far the most accomplished, for in them her function as "princess" and "heiress" is fully defined and affirmed.

The evolution of our heroine thus gives us the measure of James's progressively rising estimate of that American fate to the account of which he devoted the greater part of his work. The account opens with the simple, almost humble, instances of Mary Garland and Daisy Miller, who are baffled and shamed by Europe, and closes with the "prodigious" success of Maggie Verver, to whom Europe offers itself as a dazzling and inexhaustible opportunity. What is the heiress, then, if not a character-image of aggrandizement on every level of meaning and existence? She is that in her own right, as the representative American mounting "Europe's lighted and decorated stage"; but she also serves James as the objective equivalent of his own increase and expansion as man and artist. This is all the more striking when we consider that both author and heroine entered upon their careers under seemingly inauspicious circumstances. At the start they are beset by the traditional scruples of their race, by fits of enervation and recurrent feelings of inferiority; yet as both mature he achieves a creative dignity and consciousness of well-nigh lordly dimensions, while she comes to value herself and to be valued by the world at large as the personage appointed by history to inherit the bounty of the ages. Francis Fergusson has aptly summed up this entire process of growth in remarking that James "developed a society manner into a grand manner much as he developed a rich American girl into a larger, sober, Bérénice-like stage queen."

Such exceptional prosperity is hardly to be explained in terms of individual aptitude alone. Certain large conditions make it possible, such as America's precipitant rise as a national power in the late 19th century; its enhanced self-knowledge and self-confidence; and, more particularly, the avid desire of its upper classes to obtain forthwith the rewards and prerogatives of high civilization. The truth is that for qualities of a surpassingly bourgeois and imperial order James's heiress is without parallel in American fiction. Note that this millionaire's daughter is an

heiress in moral principle no less than in material fact, and that James, possessed of a firmer faith in the then existing structure of society than most novelists and wholly sincere in his newly-gained worldliness, tends to identify her moral with her material superiority.* Yet in the long run she cannot escape the irony—the inner ambiguity—of her status. For her wealth is at once the primary source of her so lavishly pictured “greatness” and “liberty” and the source of the evil she evokes in others. There is no ignoring the consideration, however, that in the case of the heiress, as in the case of most of James’s rich Americans, money is in a sense but the prerequisite of moral delicacy. What with her ‘higher interests’ and pieties, the rigor of her conscience and the nicety of her illusions, what is she really if not a graduate of the school of Boston Transcendentalism? Her author’s imagination operated according to the law of the conversion of the lower into the higher, and by means of this ideal logic his heroine’s debut in the “social successful worldly world” is transformed into a kind of spiritual romance. What James knew best of all is, of course, how to take things immensely for granted; and not to appreciate the wonder of his beguilement is to miss the poetry, the story, the very life of his fictions.

To grasp the national-cultural values implicit in the progress of his heroine is to be done once and for all with the widely-held assumption that to James the country of his birth always signified failure and sterility. Edmund Wilson is surely right in contending that it is America which really “gets the better of it in Henry James.” Such an interpretation is consistent with his return to the theme of the heiress at the turn of the century, with his honorific treatment of her, his enamored tone and

* Some critics writing about James in the early 1930’s sought to put him in line with the leftist trend of the times. This sort of intention is evident in Robert Cantwell’s several essays of that period and to a lesser extent in Stephen Spender’s study, *The Destructive Element*. These critics overlook, it seems to me, the depth of the conservative idea in James, and that is why they are forced to exaggerate the meaning of novels like *The Ivory Tower* and *The Princess Casamassima*. Even though in the latter the atmosphere of class conflict is genuine enough, its revolutionary theme cannot be taken at face value. For imbedded in this novel is the more familiar theme of the passionate pilgrim—the pilgrim being the hero, Hyacinth Robinson, who sees the “immeasurable misery of the people” but who also sees, even more clearly and passionately, “all that has been, as it were, rescued and redeemed from it: the treasures, the felicities, the splendors, the successes of the world”; and in the end, when the final choice is put to him, he takes his stand not with the people but with the “world” resting upon their

laudatory report of her aims and prospects—her aims and prospects being not merely those of a typical Jamesian aspirant but of an American emissary endowed with a character “intrinsically and actively ample . . . reaching southward, westward, anywhere, everywhere.” As the years passed James’s awareness of the American stake in the maintenance of civilization grew increasingly positive and imposing. In his later writings old Europe serves once more as the background for young America, and his restored interest in the nuclear fable of the passionate pilgrim is now worked out on a more ambitious scale and with more intricate artistic intentions. His last great novels are remarkable, too, for the resurgence in them of that native idealism—that “extraordinary good faith”—the effect of which in his early fiction was to link him with the classic masters of American literature. In *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl* the motives and standards of this idealism are applied to the mixed disorder and splendor of the “great world,” now no longer simply admired from afar but seen from within.

But the question whether the ultimate loyalty of James is claimed by Europe or America is hardly as meaningful as it has appeared to some of his interpreters. For actually his valuations of Europe and America are not the polar opposites but the two commanding centres of his work—the contending sides whose relation is adjusted so as to make mutual assimilation feasible. It is the only means by which the Jamesian idea of heritage can be brought to fruition. What his detractors can never forgive him, however, is his bursting the bounds of that autarchic Americanism of which Whitman is the chief exponent. Never having fallen into the habit of “glowing belligerently with one’s coun-

misery. Thus Robinson is enticed by the same image that draws the Jamesian Americans to Europe. The one variation is that he constructs this image out of class rather than national or, so to speak, hemispheric differences.

So far as the political estimate of James is concerned, one cannot but agree with Joseph Warren Beach that he is basically a “gentleman of cultivated and conservative, not to say, reactionary instinct, who will generally be found to favor the same line of conduct as that favored by the ecclesiastical and civil law, as far as the law goes” (*The Method of Henry James*). So blunt a characterisation is likely to offend the James-cultists, but I think it can stand so long as we take it in a strictly political sense, not as a judgment of his moral realism. On that score Spender is closer to the truth in observing that James “saw through the life of his age” but that he “cherished the privilege that enabled him to see through it.”

try," he is able to invest his characters with an historic mission and propel them into spheres of experience as yet closed to them at home. They are the people named as the Ambassadors—and the nationalist critics who make so much of his expatriation should be reminded that there is a world of difference between the status of an ambassador and the status of a fugitive.

James's all-inclusive choice is dramatised in his recurrent story of the marriage of an eminent new-world bride to an equally eminent old-world groom. The marriage is symbolic of the reconciliation of their competing cultures; and if it sometimes turns out badly, as in *The Portrait of a Lady*, or if it fails to come off altogether, as in *The Wings of the Dove*, James still holds fast to his scheme, continuing his experiments in matchmaking till finally, in *The Golden Bowl*, all the parts fall into their proper place, the marriage is consummated and bears luxurious fruit. Observe, though, that this happy ending is postponed again and again until the American wife, in the person of Maggie Verver, has established herself as the ruling member of the alliance.

The advancement of this heroine takes on historical form against the period-background of the American female's rise to a position of cultural prestige and authority. She it was who first reached out for the "consummations and amenities" of life while her male relatives were still earnestly engaged in procuring its "necessities and preparations." No wonder W. D. Howells declared that "the prosperity of our fiction resides in the finer female sense." Now James's so-called feminine orientation is to be explained partly by this social fact and partly by his instinct, the most exquisite possible, for private relations and for their latent refinement of fact and taste. So estranged was he from typical masculine interests that he could not but fall back more and more on the subject of marriage, a subject dominated, in his treatment of it, by the "social" note and meeting the "finer female sense" on its own preferred ground.* Moreover, he could have found no better framework

* In *The Point of View*, a story published in the early 80's, James inserts the following ironic reference to himself into the Paris-bound letter of a French visitor to New York: "They have a novelist here with pretensions to literature, who writes about the chase for the husband and the adventures of the rich Americans in our corrupt old Europe, where their primeval candor puts the Europeans to shame. *C'est proprement écrit*; but it's terribly pale." In later years he would hardly have enjoyed any such ironic play at his own expense, for with age self-depreciation gave way to portentousness in his estimate of himself.

of realistic detail for his picture of "young American innocence transplanted to European air." And if his stories of marriage are mostly stories, as he himself once put it, about "very young women, who, affected with a certain high lucidity, thereby become characters," it is because all the conditions of his art made for such a choice.

His male figures are, generally speaking, to be identified with his less masterful side, with the negative component of his sense of experience and the masochistic tendency to refuse the natural gifts of life. It is in deviating from this code of refusal that Roderick Hudson goes to pieces. In *The Ambassadors* Lambert Strether learns the lesson of *not* refusing, but his adventure in Paris gains its point from the sheer process of his learning that lesson rather than from his application of it. Nor can one overlook the repeated appearance in James of certain sad and uncertain young men who vie with each other in devising painfully subtle motives for renouncing their heart's desire once it is within their grasp. One such specimen is the young man (Bernard Longmore in *Madame de Mauves*) who is revolted by the idea of making love to the woman whose happiness he tries to save. Another is the incredibly appealing though emotionally dense Mr. Wendover, who has "no more physical personality than a consulted thermometer" and who, courting the girl he loves with more propriety than imagination, fails her when she needs him most (*A London Life*). In point of fact, the heiress is the one native Jamesian who knows exactly what she wants. She, too, is confronted, to be sure, with "beautiful difficulties," but they are never of the kind that spring from some crucial frustration or of the kind that can be translated into some moral issue, which is then to be carefully isolated and solved in a chessboard fashion. In her case the "beautiful difficulties" spring out of her very search for self-fulfillment and impetuosity in "taking full in the face the whole assault of life."

It is with a bright and sudden flutter of self-awareness that Mary Garland reveals, in a brief passage of dialogue, the state of mind of the heiress as she sets out to meet her fate. The occasion for it is a night-scene in *Roderick Hudson*, when Mary confesses to Rowland Mallet that her stay in Italy has induced a change in her conception of life:

Mary: "At home . . . things don't speak to us of enjoyment as they do here. Here it's such a mixture; one doesn't know what to believe. Beauty stands here—beauty such as this night and this place and all this sad strange summer have been so full of—and it penetrates one's soul and lodges there and keeps saying that man wasn't made, as we think at home, to struggle so much and to miss so much, but to ask of life as a matter of course some beauty and some charm. This place has destroyed any scrap of consistency that I ever possessed, but even if I must say something sinful I love it!"

Rowland: "If it's sinful I absolve you—in so far as I have power. We should not be able to enjoy, I suppose, unless we could suffer, and in anything that's worthy of the name of experience—that experience which is the real *taste* of life, isn't it?—the mixture is of the finest and subtlest."

The pathos of this dialogue is the pathos of all the buried things in the American past it recalls us to. It recalls us, moreover, to one of the most telling and precise relations in our literature, that of the early James to Hawthorne.* Consider how this relation is at once contained and developed in Mary's vision of what life holds for those bold enough to ask for it as a matter of course "some beauty and some charm." For Mary is essentially a figure from a novel such as *The Blithedale Romance* or *The Marble Faun* brought forward into a later age; and because of the shift of values that has occurred in the meantime, she is able to express in a mundane fashion those feelings and sentiments that in Hawthorne are still somewhat hidden and only spoken of with a semi-clerical quaver, as if from under a veil. In Mary's confession the spectral consciousness of the perils of beauty, of the evil it hides, is at long last being exorcised, the mind is being cleared of its home-grown fears and mystifications. The reality of experience can no longer be resisted: "Even if I say something sinful I love it!" And having said it, she is absolved of her "sin" by Rowland, who in this scene is manifestly acting for the author. It is Rowland, too, who describes experience as the "real *taste* of life," thus disclosing its innermost Jamesian sense. For in this sense of it the idea of experience is emptied of its more

* Among the first to notice the connection was William James. In 1870 he wrote to his brother: "It tickled my national feeling not a little to note the resemblance of Hawthorne's style to yours and Howells's. . . . That you and Howells, with all the models in English literature to follow, should involuntarily have imitated (as it were) this American, seems to point to the existence of some real mental American quality."

ordinary meanings, of empirical reference, and made to correspond to pure consummation, to that "felt felicity" so often invoked by James, to something lovingly selected or distilled from life—all of which is perfectly in line with the indicated function of the heiress as the prime consumer of the resources, material and spiritual, of both the Old and the New World. And though it is not within the power of even this superior brand of experience to exempt one from suffering, still the risk is well worth taking so long as "the mixture is of the finest and subtlest."

But in Mary the ferment of experience is as yet more potential than actual. At this stage James is already sure of his heroine's integrity and liveliness of imagination, knowing that in this fine flower of a provincial culture he had gotten hold of an historical prodigy admirably suited to his purpose as a novelist. He is still doubtful, however, of her future, uncertain as to the exact conditions of her entry into the "great world" and of the mutual effect thus created. Daisy Miller and Bessie Alden represent his further experiments with her character. Daisy's social adventures make for a superb recreation of manners and tones and contrasts and similitudes. Spontaneity is her principal quality—a quality retained by the heiress through all her mutations and invariably rendered as beautifully illustrative of the vigor and innocence of the national spirit. But Daisy is altogether the small-town, the average American girl; and by virtue of this fact she lays bare the lowly origin of the heiress in the undifferentiated mass of the new-world democracy. Winterbourne, Daisy's admirer and critic, observes that "she and her mamma have not yet risen to the stage—what shall I call it?—of culture, at which the idea of catching a count or a *marchesse* begins." Bessie, on the other hand, seizes upon this conception only to rise above it. This "Bostonian nymph who rejects an English duke" combines the primal sincerity of her forebears with a Jamesian sensitivity to the "momentos and reverberations of greatness" in the life of ancient aristocracies—and this amalgam of values proves to be beyond the comprehension of Lord Lambeth's simple matter-of-fact mind. Bessie's behavior was resented, of course, by English readers, just as Daisy's was resented by American readers. But the so-challenged author, far from being flustered by the protests that reached him, took it all in with gloating satisfaction, delighted by the contrast, with its "dramas upon dramas . . . and innumerable points of view," thus brought to light. He felt that the emotion

of the public vindicated his faith in the theme of the "international situation."

As the 1870's come to a close, James is done with the preliminary studies of his heroine. Now he undertakes to place her in a longer narrative—*The Portrait of a Lady*—the setting and action of which are at last commensurate with the "mysterious purposes" and "vast designs" of her character. In the preface to the New York edition (written nearly a quarter of a century later) he recalls that the conception of a "certain young woman affronting her destiny had begun with being all my outfit for the large building of the novel"; and he reports that in its composition he was faced with only one leading question: "What will she 'do'?" But this is mainly a rhetorical question, for naturally "the first thing she'll do will be to come to Europe—which in fact will form, and all inevitably, no small part of her principal adventure." *The Portrait* is by far the best novel of James's early prime, bringing to an end his literary apprenticeship and establishing the norms of his world. Its author has not yet entirely divorced himself from Victorian models in point of structure, and as a stylist he is still mindful of the reader's more obvious pleasure, managing his prose with an eye to outward as well as inward effects. It is a lucid prose, conventional yet free, marked by aphoristic turns of phrase and by a kind of intellectual gaiety in the formulation of ideas. There are few signs as yet of that well-nigh metaphysical elaboration of the sensibility by which he is to become known as one of the foremost innovators in modern writing.

Isabel Archer is a young lady of an Emersonian cast of mind, but her affinity as a fictional character is rather with those heroines of Turgenev in whose nature an extreme tenderness is conjoined with unusual strength of purpose.* No sooner does Isabel arrive at the country-house of her uncle Mr. Touchett, an American banker residing in England, than everyone recognizes her for what she is—"a delicate piece of human machinery." Her cousin Ralph questions his mother: "Who is this rare creature, and what is she? Where did you find her?" "I found her," she replies, "in an old house at Albany, sitting in a dreary

* The influence may well be conscious in this case, though in the preface to the novel James admits to being influenced by the Russian novelist only on the technical plane, with respect to the manner of placing characters in fiction. James's critical essays abound with favorable references to Turgenev, whose friendship he cultivated in Paris and of whom he invariably spoke with enthusiasm.

room on a rainy day. . . . She didn't know she was bored, but when I told her she seemed grateful for the hint. . . . I thought she was meant for something better. It occurred to me it would be a kindness to take her about and introduce her to the world." The American Cinderella thus precipitated from the town of Albany into the "great world" knows exactly what she much look forward to. "To be as happy as possible," she confides in Ralph, "that's what I came to Europe for." It is by no means a simple answer. On a later and more splendid occasion it is to be repeated by Maggie Verver, who proclaims her faith, even as the golden bowl crashes to the ground, "in a "happiness without a hole in it . . . the golden bowl as it *was* to have been . . . the bowl with all our happiness in it, the bowl without a crack in it." This is the crowning illusion and pathos, too, of the heiress, that she believes such happiness to be attainable, that money can buy it and her mere good faith can sustain it. And even when eventually her European entanglements open her eyes to the fact that virtue and experience are not so charmingly compatible after all, that the Old World has a fierce energy of its own and that its "tone of time" is often pitched in a sinister key, she still persists in her belief that this same world will yield her a richly personal happiness, proof against the evil spawned by others less fortunate than herself; and this belief is all the more expressive because it is wholly of a piece with the psychology of the heiress as a national type. The ardor of Americans in pursuing happiness as a personal goal is equalled by no other people, and when it eludes them none are so hurt, none so shamed. Happiness, one might say, is really their private equivalent of such ideals as progress and universal justice. They take for granted, with a faith at once deeply innocent and deeply presumptuous, that they deserve nothing less and that to miss it is to miss life itself.

The heiress is not to be humbled by the tests to which life in Europe exposes her. The severer the test the more intense the glow of her spirit. Is she not the child, as Isabel proudly declares, of that "great country which stretches beyond the rivers and across the prairies, blooming and smiling and spreading, till it stops at the blue Pacific! A strong, sweet, fresh odour seems to rise from it. . . ." The Emersonian note is sounded again and again by Isabel. She is truly the Young American so grandly pictured by the Concord idealist in his essay of that title, the Young American bred in a land "offering opportunity to the human mind not

known in any other region" and hence possessed of an "organic simplicity and liberty, which, when it loses its balance, redresses itself presently. . . ." Witness the following passage of character-analysis, with its revelation of Isabel's shining beneficent Emersonianism:

Every now and then Isabel found out she was wrong, and then she treated herself to a week of passionate humility. After that she held her head higher than ever; for it was of no use, she had an unquenchable desire to think well of herself. She had a theory that it was only on this condition that life was worth living: that one should be of the best, should be conscious of a fine organization . . . *should move in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration fully chronic. It was almost as unnecessary to cultivate doubt of oneself as to cultivate doubt of one's best friend.* . . . The girl had a certain nobleness of imagination which rendered her a good many services and played her a good many tricks. She spent half her time in thinking of beauty, and bravery, and magnanimity; *she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action; she thought it would be detestable to be afraid or ashamed.* (Italics not in the original.)

Still more revealing is the exchange between Isabel and the thoroughly Europeanised Madame Merle on the subject of the individual's capacity for self-assertion in the face of outward circumstances:

Madame Merle: "When you have lived as long as I, you will see that every human being has his shell, that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There is no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of a cluster of circumstances. What do you call one's self? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to me—and then it flows back again. I know that a large part of myself is in the dresses I choose to wear. I have a great respect for *things!*"

Isabel: "I don't agree with you. . . . I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is a measure of me; on the contrary, it's a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one." *

* Note the close parallel between Isabel's reply to Madame Merle and the Emersonian text. "You think me the child of my circumstances: I make my circumstances. Let any thought or motive of mine be different from what they are, the difference will transform my condition and economy. . . . You call it the power of circumstance, but it is the power of me" (*The Transcendentalist*).

In *The Portrait* James is still hesitating between the attitude of Madame Merle and that of Isabel, and his irony is provoked by the excessive claims advanced by both sides. But in years to come he is to be drawn more and more to the "European" idea of the human self, his finer discriminations being increasingly engaged by the "envelope of circumstances" in which it is contained.

Isabel is above all a young lady of principles, and her most intimate decisions are ruled by them. In refusing the proposal of the grandiose Lord Warburton, she wonders what ideal aspiration or design upon fate or conception of happiness prompts her to renounce such a chance for glamor and worldly satisfaction. Never had she seen a "personage" before, as there were none in her native land; of marriage she had been accustomed to think solely in terms of character—"of what one likes in a gentleman's mind and in his talk . . . hitherto her visions of a completed life had concerned themselves largely with moral images—things as to which the question would be whether they pleased her soul." But if an aristocratic marriage is not to Isabel's liking, neither is the strictly hometown alternative of marrying a business man. The exemplary Gaspar Goodwood, who owns a cotton-mill and is the embodiment of patriotic virtue, likewise fails to win her consent.—"His jaw was too square and grim, and his figure too straight and stiff; these things suggested a want of easy adaptability to some of the occasions of life."

Isabel having so far lacked the requisite fortune to back up her assumption of the role of the heiress, her cousin Ralph provides what is wanting by persuading his dying father to leave her a large sum of money. "I should like to make her rich," Ralph declares. "What do you mean by rich?" "I call people rich when they are able to gratify their imagination." Thus Isabel enters the uppermost circle of her author's hierarchy, the circle of those favored few who, unhampered by any material coercion, are at once free to make what they can of themselves and to accept the fullest moral responsibility for what happens to them in consequence. Now the stage is set for the essential Jamesian drama of free choice. In this novel, however, the transcendent worth of such freedom is not yet taken for granted as it is in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*. There is the intervention, for instance, of the lady-correspondent Henrietta Stackpole, who is no passionate pilgrim but the mouthpiece, rather, of popular Americanism. It is she

who questions Isabel's future on the ground that her money will work against her by bolstering her romantic inclinations. Henrietta is little more than a fictional convenience used to furnish the story with comic relief; but at this juncture of the plot she becomes the agent of a profound criticism aimed, in the last analysis, at James himself, at his own tendency to romanticise the values to which privilege lays claim. And what Henrietta has to say is scarcely in keeping with her habitual manner of the prancing female journalist. Characteristically enough, she begins by remarking that she has no fear of Isabel turning into a sensual woman; the peril she fears is of a different nature:

"The peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams—you are not enough in contact with reality—with the toiling, striving, suffering, I may even say, sinning world that surrounds you. You are too fastidious, you have too many graceful illusions. Your newly-acquired thousands will shut you up more and more in the society of selfish and heartless people, who will be interested in keeping up those illusions. . . . You think, furthermore, that you can lead a romantic life, that you can live by pleasing others and pleasing yourself. You will find you are mistaken. Whatever life you lead, you must put your soul into it—to make any sort of success of it; and from the moment you do that it ceases to be romance, I assure you; it becomes reality! . . . you think we can escape disagreeable duties by taking romantic views—that is your great illusion, my dear."

The case against the snobbish disposition of the Jamesian culture-seekers and their over-estimation of the worldly motive has seldom been so shrewdly and clearly stated. But Isabel is not especially vulnerable to criticism of this sort. It is only in her later incarnations that the heiress succumbs more and more to precisely the illusions of which Henrietta gives warning—so much so that in the end, when Maggie Verver appears on the scene, the life she leads may be designated, from the standpoint of the purely social analyst, as a romance of bourgeois materialism, the American romance of newly-got wealth divesting itself of its plebeian origins in an ecstasy of refinement!

Henrietta's words, moreover, are meant to prefigure the tragedy of Isabel's marriage to Gilbert Osmond, an Italianate American, virtually a European, whom she takes to be what he is not—a decent compromise between the moral notions of her American background and the glamor of the European foreground. Osmond, whose special line is a dread

of vulgarity, employs a kind of sincere cunning in presenting himself to Isabel as the most fastidious gentleman living, concerned above all with making his life a work of art and resolved, since he could never hope to attain the status he actually deserved, "not to go in for honors." The courtship takes place in Rome and in Florence, where Isabel is swayed by her impression of Osmond as a "quiet, clever, distinguished man, strolling on a moss-grown terrace above the sweet Val d'Arna . . . the picture was not brilliant, but she liked its lowness of tone, and the atmosphere of summer twilight that pervaded it. . . . It seemed to speak of a serious choice, a choice between things of a shallow and things of a deep interest; of a lonely, studious life in a lovely land." But the impression is false. Only when it is too late does she learn that he had married her for her money with the connivance of Madame Merle, his former mistress, who had undertaken to influence her in his behalf. This entrapment of Isabel illustrates a recurrent formula of James's fiction. The person springing the trap is almost invariably driven by mercenary motives, and, like Osmond, is capable of accomplishing his aim by simulating a sympathy and understanding that fascinate the victim and render her (or him) powerless.* Osmond still retains some features of the old-fashioned villain, but his successors are gradually freed from the encumbrances of melodrama. Merton Densher (*The Wings of the Dove*) and Prince Amerigo (*The Golden Bowl*) are men of grace and intelligence, whose wicked behavior is primarily determined by the situation in which they find themselves.

Osmond reacts to the Emersonian strain in Isabel as to a personal offence. He accuses her of wilfully rejecting traditional values and of harboring sentiments "worthy of a radical newspaper or a Unitarian preacher." And she, on her part, discovers that his fastidiousness reduced itself to a "sovereign contempt for every one but some or three or four exalted people whom he envied, and for everything but half-a-dozen ideas of his own . . . he pointed out to her so much of the baseness and shabbiness of life . . . but this base, ignoble world, it appeared, was

*It seems to me that this brand of evil has much in common with the "unpardonable sin" by which Hawthorne was haunted—the sin of *using* other people, of "violating the sanctity of a human heart." Chillingsworth in *The Scarlet Letter* is essentially this type of sinner, and so is Miriam's model in *The Marble Faun*. In James, however, the evil characters have none of the Gothic *mystique* which is to be found in Hawthorne. Their motives are transparent.

after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it forever in one's eye, in order, not to enlighten, or convert, or redeem, but to extract from it some recognition of one's superiority." Isabel's notion of the aristocratic life is "simply the union of great knowledge with great liberty," whereas for Osmond it is altogether a "thing of forms," an attitude of conscious calculation. His esteem for tradition is boundless; if one was so unfortunate as not to be born to an illustrious tradition, then "one must immediately proceed to make it."* A sense of darkness and suffocation takes hold of Isabel as her husband's rigid system closes in on her. She believes that there can be no release from the bondage into which she had fallen and that only through heroic suffering is its evil to be redeemed. On this tragic note the story ends.

Yet the heiress is not to be turned aside from her quest by such inevitable encounters with the old evils of history. On the lighted stage the bridegroom still awaits his new-world bride.

In few of his full-length novels is James so consummately in control of his method of composition as in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*. It is a method all scenic and dramatic, of an "exquisite economy" in the architectural placing of incidents, which eliminates any "going behind or telling about the figures" save as they themselves accomplish it. Indulgence in mere statement is banned; the motto is: *represent, convert, dramatise*. By means of this compositional economy the story is so organised that it seems to tell itself, excluding all material

* The significance of Osmond's character has generally been underrated by the critics of James. For quite apart from his more personal traits (such as his depravity, which is a purely novelistic element), he is important as a cultural type in whom the logic of "traditionalism" is developed to its furthest limits. As a national group the American intellectuals suffer from a sense of inferiority toward the past, and this residue of "colonial" feeling is also to be detected in those among them who raise the banner of tradition. It is shown in their one-sided conformity to the idea of tradition, in their readiness to inflate the meanings that may be derived from it. Their tendency is to take literally what their European counterparts are likely to take metaphorically and imaginatively. My idea is that James tried to overcome this bias which he suspected in himself by objectifying it in the portrait of Osmond. To this day, however, the shadow of Gilbert Osmond falls on many a page of American writing whose author—whether critic, learned poet, or academic "humanist"—presents himself, with all the exaggerated zeal and solemnity of a belated convert, as a spokesman of tradition.

not directly bearing on the theme. This despite the "complication of innuendo and associative reference," as William James called it, by which the author communicates the vital information needed to understand the action. Complications of this sort so confuse some readers that they see nothing but surplus-matter and digression where, in fact, everything is arranged in the most compact order. Nor is the occasional wordiness and vagueness of James's prose germane to our judgment of his novelistic structure. Even the thoughts of his characters are reproduced along exclusive rather than inclusive lines, as in *The Golden Bowl*, where the interior monologues of Maggie and the Prince are in reality a kind of speech which no one happens to overhear, showing none of the rich incoherence, haphazardness, and latitude of Joyce's rendering of the private mind, for example.

The principle of free association is incompatible with the Jamesian technique, which is above all a technique of exclusion. One can best describe it, it seems to me, as the fictional equivalent of the poetic modes evolved by modern poets seeking to produce a "pure poetry." In this sense the later James has more in common with a poet like Mallarmé than with novelists like Joyce and Proust, whose tendency is to appropriate more and more material and to assimilate to their medium even such non-fictional forms as the poem and the essay. In Proust the specific experience is made use of to launch all sorts of generalisations, to support, that is, his innumerable analyses—by turn poetic and essayistic—of memory, love, jealousy, the nature of art, etc. In Joyce this impulse to generalisation finds other outlets, such as the investing of the specific experience with mythic associations that help us to place it within the pattern of human recurrence and typicality. James tightens where Joyce and Proust loosen the structure of the novel. In their hands the novel takes on encyclopedic dimensions, surrendering its norms and imperialistically extending itself, so to speak, to absorb all literary genres. It might be claimed, in fact, that *the novel as they write it ceases to be itself, having been transformed into a comprehensive work from which none of the resources of literature are excluded.* Not that they abandon the principal of selection; the point is rather that they select material to suit their desire for an unrestricted expansion of the medium, whereas James selects with a view to delimiting the medium and defining its proper course. He confirms, as very few novelists do, Goethe's observa-

tion that the artistic effect requires a closed space. It is true that at bottom it is culture and the history of culture which constitute the inner theme of all three writers, but while Joyce and Proust express it by continually revealing its universality, James expresses it by limiting himself, through an extraordinary effort of aesthetic calculation, to its particularity.

One need not go so far as to say that the formal character of the Jamesian novel is determined by its social character in order to emphasise the close relation between the two. Both manifest the same qualities of particularity and exclusiveness. But why, it might be asked, is Proust's work so different in form, given the fact that he, too, is drawn by the resplendent image of the "great world" and, presumably, is quite as responsive to some of the values attributed to James? The answer would be that even on this ground the American and the French novelist are more at variance than would seem at first glance.

Proust's picture of society contains elements of lyricism as well as elements of objective analysis. He is a more realistic painter of social manners than James, perhaps for the reason that he permits no ethical issues to intervene between him and the subject, approaching the world *ab initio* with the tacit assumption that ethics are irrelevant to its functions. By comparison James is a traditional moralist whose insight into experience turns on his judgment of conduct. If sometimes, as in *The Golden Bowl*, we are made to feel that he is withholding judgment or judging wrongly, that may be because he is either conforming, or appears to conform, to certain moral conventions of the world's making by which it manages to flatter itself. In Proust such conventions are brought out into the open, but not for purposes of moral judgment. The sole morality of which the protagonist of his novel is conscious grows out of the choice he faces between two contrary ideals. He must decide whether to pursue the art of life or the life of art, and the novel can be said to be an epical autobiography of his effort to come to a decision. But it is not until the end-volume that the world is finally renounced; and through a kind of optical illusion induced by the novel's astonishing unfoldment, we seem to participate in this renunciation of the world at the precise moment when its alternative—i.e. the work of art—actually comes into being, or, more accurately, is at last fully realized. Since in this work the world is overcome only after it has been possessed, the unity of life and art

is affirmed in it despite the author's attempt to divorce them by closing with a purely subjective account of the artistic process. (No matter what Proust intended this account to mean, taken in its context it affects us as an ironic expression of the artist's triumph over his material, a mocking valediction addressed to that recalcitrant angel—the objective spirit of reality—with whom the artist grappled through the long night of creation and, having gotten the better of him, can now treat with disdain.)

But if in Proust art and life are unified by the contradiction between them, in James they are initially combined in his root-idea of experience. His passionate pilgrims, such as the heiress, are driven, despite all vacillations and retractions, by their need to master the world (which is identified with experience and the "real *taste* of life"), and in art they recognize the means by which the world becomes most richly aware of itself. As Americans they have come to it so belatedly that they can ill afford either the spiritual luxury or spiritual desperation of looking beyond it. This is the reason, I think, that except for the early example of *Roderick Hudson* and later of *The Tragic Muse*, the theme of art and artists enters significantly and independently only into some of James's short stories, in which he deals not with his representative figures but with his own case as a professional writer somewhat estranged from society by his devotion to his craft. Though these stories testify to the artistic idealism of their author, they can scarcely be taken as a serious challenge to the authority of the world.

Now at this point it should be evident that James's inability to overcome the world, in the sense that most European writers of like caliber overcome it, is due not to his being too much of it, but, paradoxically enough, to his being too little of it. And for that the explanation must be sought in his origins. For he approaches the world with certain *presumptions of piety* that clearly derive from the semi-religious idealism of his family-background and, more generally, from the early traditions and faith of the American community. But in James this idealism and faith undergo a radical change, in that they are converted to secular ends. Thus one might venture the speculation that his worldly-aesthetic idea of an elite is in some way associated, however remotely and unconsciously, with the ancestral-puritan idea of the elect; hence the ceremoniousness and suggestions of ritual in the social display of a novel like

The Golden Bowl. So with the ancestral ideas of sin and grace. Is it not possible to claim that the famous Jamesian refinement is a trait in which the vision of an ideal state is preserved—the state of grace to be chieved here and now through mundane and aesthetic means? It is the vision by which Milly Theale is transported as she rests in her Venetian garden—the vision of “never going down, of remaining aloft in the divine dustless air, where she could but hear the splash of water against the stone.” And through the same process, as I have already had occasion to remark, the fear of sin is translated in James into a revulsion, an exasperated feeling, almost morbid in its sensitiveness, against any conceivable crudity of scene or crudity of conduct.

Yet whatever the sources and implications of the social legend in James, I have no doubt that it enabled him as nothing else could to formulate his creative method and to remain true, even on his lower levels, to the essential mood and sympathy of his genius. There is an essay on Proust by Paul Valéry in which he speaks of the French novelist’s capacity “to adapt the potentialities of his inner life” to the aim of expressing “one group of people . . . which calls itself Society,” thus converting the picture of an avowedly superficial existence into a profound work. But I have always felt that what Valéry is saying in this essay could more appropriately be said about the later James than about Proust.—

The group which calls itself Society is composed of symbolic figures. Each of its members represents some abstraction. It is necessary that all the powers of this world should somewhere meet together; that *money* should converse with *beauty*, and *politics* become familiar with *elegance*; that *letters* and *birth* grow friendly and serve each other tea. . . . Just as a banknote is only a slip of paper, so the member of society is a sort of fiduciary money made of living flesh. This combination is extremely favorable to the designs of a subtle novelist.

. . . very great art, which is the art of simplified figures and the most pure types; in other words, of essences which permit the symmetrical and almost musical development of the consequences arising from a carefully isolated situation—such art involves the existence of a conventional milieu, where the language is adorned with veils and provided with limits, where *seeming* commands *being* and where *being* is held in a noble restraint which changes all of life into an opportunity to exercise presence of mind. (*A Tribute*)

This is, however, a peculiarly one-sided view of the Proustian scene, as Valéry allows himself to be carried away by the comparison between the old French literature of the Court and *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. Proust balances his poetic appreciation of the Guermantes way with a more than sufficient realism in portraying the rages of Charlus, the passions of Saint-Loup, the schemes of Mme. Verdurin, Bloch, Morel, Jupien, etc.; nor is he averse to showing the pathological condition of that "group which calls itself Society"; he, too, is infected, after all, with the modern taste for excess, for speaking out with inordinate candor. The truth is that it is in James, rather than in Proust, that we often find it difficult to make certain of the real contours of *being* behind the smooth mask of *seeming*. It is *his* language which is "adorned with veils and provided with limits," and it is the conversation of *his* characters which is so allusive that it seems more to spare than to release the sense.

And Valéry continues: "After a new power has gained recognition, no great time passes before its representatives appear at the gatherings of society; and the movement of history is pretty well summarized by the successive admissions of different social types to the salons, hunts, marriages, and funerals of the supreme tribe of a nation." What an apt description of the rise of the heiress—of, say, Milly Theale entering a London drawing-room and being greeted by Lord Mark as the first woman of her time, or of Maggie Verver gravely telling the prince to whom she has just become engaged that he is an object of beauty, a *morceau du musée*, though of course she hasn't the least idea what it would cost her father to acquire him, and that together they shall possess the "world, the beautiful world!"

ATTITUDES TOWARD HENRY JAMES

Henry James is at once the most and least appreciated figure in American writing. His authority as a novelist of unique quality and as an archetypal American has grown immeasurably in the years since his death, and in some literary circles his name has of late been turned into the password of a cult. But at the same time he is still regarded, in those circles that exert the major influence on popular education and intelligence, with the coldness and even derision that he encountered in the most depressed period of his career, when his public deserted him and he found himself almost alone.

To illustrate the extent to which he is even now misunderstood, let me cite the opening gambit of the section on James in *The College Book of American Literature*, a text currently used in many schools. "It is not certain that Henry James really belongs to American literature, for he was critical of America and admired Europe." The attitude so automatically expressed by the editors of this academic volume obviously borders on caricature. The responsibility for it, however, must be laid at the door of all those critics and historians who, in response to a deep anti-intellectual compulsion or at the service of some blindly nationalistic

or social creed, are not content merely to say no to the claims made in James's behalf but must ever try to despoil him utterly. The strategy is simple: James was nothing but a self-deluded expatriate snob, a concoctor of elegant if intricate trifles, a fugitive from "reality," etc., etc. Professor Pattee, a run-of-the-mill historian of American writing, permits himself the remark that James's novels "really accomplish nothing." Ludwig Lewisohn is likewise repelled by the novels—"cathedrals of frosted glass" he calls them; in his opinion only the shorter narratives are worth reading. In his *Main Currents* Parrington gives two pages to James as against eleven to James Branch Cabell, and he has the further temerity (and/or innocence) to round out his two pages by comparing James—much to his disadvantage, of course—to Sherwood Anderson. And Van Wyck Brooks does all he can, in "New England: Indian Summer," to promote once more the notoriously low estimate of the later James to which he committed himself in *The Pilgrimage*. Brooks may well believe that the Jamesian attachment is to be counted among the fixed ideas of our native "coterie-writers"—and plainly the best cure for a fixed idea is to stamp on it.

This depreciation of James is prepared for by some of the leading assumptions of our culture. The attitude of Parrington, for example, is formed by the Populist spirit of the West and its open-air poetics, whereas that of Brooks is at bottom formed by the moralism of New England—a moralism to which he has reverted, even though in practice he applies it in a more or less impressionistic and sentimental manner, with all the vehemence of a penitent atoning for his backsliding in the past. And the difference between such typical attitudes is mainly this: that while Parrington—like Whitman and Mark Twain before him—rejects James entirely, Brooks at least recognizes the value and fidelity to life of his earlier novels. Yet if James can be named, in T. S. Eliot's phrase, "a positive continuator of the New England genius," then surely Brooks must be aware of it as well as any of us; for he is nothing if not a pious servitor of this genius; after all, he, too, is a paleface. But still he scoffs at the more complex and, so to speak, ultimate James. And this Brooks does essentially for the same reasons, I think, that the Boston public of the 1870's scoffed at the works he now admits into his canon. We know that when the first of James's books appeared in America, they were actively disliked in Boston: Mrs. Fields (the wife of the publisher)

relates that they were thought "self-conscious, artificial, and shallow." A like animus is now betrayed in Brooks's judgment of such novels as *The Spoils of Poynton*, *The Wings of the Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*:

Magnificent pretensions, petty performances!—the fruits of an irresponsible imagination, of a deranged sense of values, of a mind working in a void, uncorrected by any clear consciousness of human cause and effect (*The Pilgrimage of Henry James*).

There was scarcely enough substance in these great ghosts of novels. . . . What concerned him now was form, almost regardless of content, the problems of calculation and construction. . . . His American characters might be nobler, but, if the old world was corrupt, its glamor outweighed its corruption in his mind . . . so that he later pictured people, actually base, as eminent, noble and great (*New England: Indian Summer*).

What are such extreme statements if not critical rationalizations of the original Boston prejudice? Brooks begins by magnifying the distinctions between James's early and late manner into an absolute contradiction, and ends by invoking the charge of degeneracy. But the fact is that the changes in James's work mark no such gap as Brooks supposes but are altogether implicit in the quality of his vision, flowing from the combined release and elaboration of his basic tendency. Moreover, these changes, far from justifying the charge of degeneracy, define for a good many of his readers the one salient example in our literature of a novelist who, not exhausted by his initial assertion of power, learned how to nourish his gifts and grow to full maturity. To me he is the only really fine American writer of the nineteenth century who can truly be said to have mastered that "principle of growth," to the failure of which in our creative life Brooks has himself repeatedly called attention in his earlier preachments.

For what is to be admired in a late narrative like *The Wings of the Dove* is James's capacity to lift the nuclear theme of his first period—the theme of the American innocent's penetration into the "rich and deep and dark" hive of Europe—to a level of conscious experience and aesthetic possession not previously attained. James orders his world with consummate awareness in this narrative, applying successfully his favorite rule of an "exquisite economy" in composition. There are brilliant scenes in it of London and Venice, and strongly contrasted symbols of social glamor and decay; it is invigorated, too, by an unflagging realism in the

plotting of act and motive and by the large movement of the characters. No literary standpoint that allows for the dismissal of this creation as a "petty performance" can possibly be valid. Is its heroine, Milly Theale, a character without reality? She remains in our mind, writes Edmund Wilson, "as a personality independent of the novel, the kind of personality, deeply felt, invested with poetic beauty and unmistakably individualized, which only the creators of the first rank can give life to."

James suffers from a certain one-sidedness, to be sure. This tends to throw off balance such readers as are unable to see it for what it is—the price he paid, given the circumstances of his career, for being faithful to his own genius. For James could continue to develop and sustain his "appeal to a high refinement and a handsome wholeness of effect" only through intensively exploiting his very limitations, through submitting himself to a process of creative yet cruel self-exaggeration. The strain shows in the stylization of his language, a stylization so rich that it turns into an intellectual quality of rare value, but which at times is apt to become overwrought and drop into unconscious parody. It is further shown in his obsessive refinement—a veritable delirium of refinement—which again serves at times to remove us from the actuality of the represented experience. This should be related to his all-too-persistent attempts, as Yvor Winters has observed, to make the sheer *tone* of speech and behavior "carry vastly more significance than is proper to it." It is true that, for instance, in novels like *The Sense of the Past* and *The Awkward Age*, he pushes his feelings for nuances and discriminations to an unworkable extreme. But such distortions, inflated into awful vices by his detractors, are of the kind which in one form or another not only James but most of the considerable modern artists are forced to cultivate as a means of coping with the negative environment that confines them. To regard such distortions as the traits of a willful coterie is utterly naive. They are the traits, rather, of an art which, if it is to survive at all in a society inimical to all interests that are pure, gratuitous, and without cash value, has no other recourse save constantly to "refine its singularities" and expose itself more and more to the ravages of an unmitigated individualism.

But in all this I do not mean to imply that I agree with those enthusiasts who see no moral defects whatever in James. From the viewpoint of social criticism, there is a good deal of justice in Ferner Nuhn's

mordant analysis of *The Golden Bowl*.^{*} This novel is one of the much debated items in the James canon, for in it James applied his spellbinding powers as never before to the creation of a life of illusory value for his wealthy Americans in Europe and their sponging aristocratic friends with whom they conduct a romantic historical liaison. Not a few critics have been provoked by this quality of the novel. One instance is Stephen Spender, who, flying in the face of the Jamesian specifications, describes Prince Amerigo as "an unknown, well-bred scoundrel." Some have argued, weakly, I think, that the picture of the Ververs and their bought-and-paid-for Prince is to be taken in an ironical sense. In *Henry James: the Major Phase* F. O. Matthiessen takes the story as given, and his interpretation coincides in many respects with Ferner Nuhn's reading of it. I agree entirely with their approach, but one cannot go along with Matthiessen in his conclusion that the novel is "with all its magnificence . . . almost as hollow of real life as the chateaux that had risen along Fifth Avenue and that had also crowded out the old Newport world that James remembered." To say that *The Golden Bowl* is morally decadent is one thing, but to claim that for this reason it is empty of life and, by implication, an inferior work of art is something else again. To my mind, this is an example of moral over-reaction at the expense of literary judgment. I can think of other novels, say Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*, which is thoroughly distorted from the standpoint of any radical social morality but which is none the less a supreme work of fiction. *The Golden Bowl* must be placed, I believe, among the half dozen great novels of American literature; there is one section in it—the second, third, and fourth chapters of the fifth "Book"—which for vividness, directness, and splendidly alive and spacious imagery is without counterpart in the American novel. Ferner Nuhn has defined *The Golden Bowl* as a dream story. He is right of course, since the indicated position of its characters and the idea they have of themselves are not in correspondence with reality. Yet as a dream story it is far from being a mere invention. It has the enormous vitality which springs from the actual dreamlife of a social class—a dream of the "loot of empire," an imperial dream full of "real" objects and "real" life. One can object to its content on ideological grounds, and on those grounds James is indeed vulnerable; but one cannot deny that it is historically meaningful and that it has

^{*} In his book, *The Wind Blows from the East*, 1942.

interest and artistry and a kind of meditated though cruel beauty.

Furthermore, whatever one may think of the millionaire self-indulgence of the Veivers, this is a far cry from the charge that James's long exile put him into such a bad state that he could no longer distinguish between the noble and the base. This sort of charge is answered once and for all, it seems to me, by Stephen Spender in his study, *The Destructive Element*:

The morality of the heroes and heroines [in the last great novels] is to "suffer generously." What they have to suffer from is being more intelligent than the other characters. Also, there are no villains. It is important to emphasize this, because in these really savage novels the behavior of some of the characters is exposed in its most brutal form. But the wickedness of the characters lies primarily in their situation. Once the situation is provided, the actors cannot act otherwise. Their only compensation is that by the use of their intelligence, by their ability to understand, to love and to suffer, they may to some extent atone for the evil which is simply the evil of the modern world.

As against the sundry moralizers and nationalists who belittle James, there are the cultists who go to the other extreme in presenting him as a kind of culture-hero, an ideal master whose perfection of form is equaled by his moral insight and staunch allegiance to "tradition." This image is no doubt of consolatory value to some high-minded literary men. It contributes, however, to the misunderstanding of James, in that it is so impeccable, one might say transcendent, that it all but eliminates the contradictions in him—and in modern literature, which bristles with anxieties and ideas of isolation, it is above all the creativity, the depth and quality of the contradictions that a writer unites within himself, that gives us the truest measure of his achievement. And this is not primarily a matter of the solutions, if any, provided by the writer—for it is hardly the writer's business to stand in for the scientist or philosopher—but of his force and integrity in reproducing these contradictions as felt experience. Very few of us would be able to appreciate Dostoevsky, for instance, if we first had to accept his answer to the problem of the Christian man, or Proust if we first had to accept his answer to the problem of the artist. We appreciate these novelists because they employ imaginative means that convince us of the reality of their problems, which are not *necessarily* ours.

T. S. Eliot was surely right in saying that the soil of James's origin imparted a "flavor" that was "precisely improved and given its chance, not worked off" by his living in Europe. Now James differs radically in his contradictions from European novelists—that is why readers lacking a background in American or at least Anglo-Saxon culture make so little of him. And the chief contradiction is that his work represents a positive and ardent search for "experience" and simultaneously a withdrawal from it, or rather, a dread of approaching it in its natural state. Breaking sharply with the then still dominant American morality of abstention, he pictures "experience" as the "real taste of life," as a longed-for "presence" at once "vast, vague, and dazzling—an irradiation of light from objects undefined, mixed with the atmosphere of Paris and Venice." Nevertheless, to prove truly acceptable, it must first be Americanized as it were, that is to say, penetrated by the new-world conscience and cleansed of its taint of "evil." This tension between the impulse to plunge into "experience" and the impulse to renounce it is the chief source of the internal yet astonishingly abundant Jamesian emotion; and because the tension is not always adequately resolved, we sometimes get that effect, so well described by Glenway Wescott, of "embarrassed passion and hinted meaning in excess of the narrated facts; the psychic content is too great for its container of elegantly forged happenings; it all overflows and slops about and is magnificently wasted." On this side of James we touch upon his relationship to Hawthorne, whose characters, likewise tempted by "experience," are held back by the fear of sin. And Hawthorne's ancestral idea of sin survives in James, though in a secularized form. It has entered the sensibility and been translated into a revulsion, an exasperated feeling, almost morbid in its sensitiveness, against any conceivable crudity of scene or crudity of conduct. (The trouble with American life, he wrote, is not that it is "ugly"—the ugly can be strange and grotesque—but that it is "plain"; "even nature, in the western world, has the peculiarity of seeming rather crude and immature.") Any failure of discrimination is sin, whereas virtue is a compound of intelligence, moral delicacy and the sense of the past.

And Hawthorne's remembrance of the religious mythology of New England and his fanciful concern with it is replaced in James—and this too is a kind of transmutation—by the remembrance and fanciful concern with history. It was for the sake of Europe's historical "opulence" that

he left his native land. Yet this idea is also managed by him in a contradictory fashion, and for this reason W. C. Brownell was able to say that he showed no real interest in the "course of history." Now as a critic Brownell had no eye for James's historical picture of the American experience in Europe; but it is true that on the whole James's sense of history is restricted by the point of view of the "passionate pilgrim" who comes to rest in the shade of civilization. Above all, he comes to enrich his personality. Thus there is produced the Jamesian conception of history as a static yet irreproachable standard, a beautiful display, a treasured background, whose function is at once to adorn and lend perspective to his well nigh metaphysical probing of personal relations, of the private life. There never was a writer so immersed in personal relations, and his consistency in this respect implies an anti-historical attitude. This helps to explain the peculiarities of his consciousness, which is intellectual yet at the same time indifferent to general ideas, deeply comprehensive yet unattached to any open philosophical motive.

These contradictions in James—and there are others besides those I have mentioned—are chiefly to be accounted for in terms of his situation as an American writer who experienced his nationality and the social class to which he belonged at once as an ordeal and as an inspiration. The "great world" is corrupt, yet it represents an irresistible goal. Innocence points to all the wanted things one has been deprived of, yet it is profound in its good faith and not to be tampered with without loss. History and culture are the supreme ideal, but why not make of them a strictly private possession? Europe is romance and reality and civilization, but the spirit resides in America. James never faltered in the maze of these contraries; he knew how to take hold of them creatively and weave them into the web of his art. And the secret of their combination is the secret of his irony and of his humor.

TOLSTOY: THE GREEN TWIG AND THE BLACK TRUNK

The critic's euphoria in the Tolstoyan weather. Tolstoy and literature. The green twig and the black trunk. The art of Tolstoy is of such irresistible simplicity and truth, is at once so intense and so transparent in all of its effects, that the need is seldom felt to analyze the means by which it becomes what it is, that is to say, its method or sum of techniques. In the bracing Tolstoyan air, the critic, however addicted to analysis, cannot help doubting his own task, sensing that there is something presumptuous and even unnatural, which requires an almost artificial deliberateness of intention, in the attempt to dissect an art so wonderfully integrated that, coming under its sway, we grasp it as a whole long before we are able to summon sufficient consciousness to examine the arrangement and interaction of its component parts.

Tolstoy is the exact opposite of those writers, typical of the modern age, whose works are to be understood only in terms of their creative strategies and design. The most self-observant of men, whose books are scarcely conceivable apart from the ceaseless introspection of which they are the embodiment, Tolstoy was least self-conscious in his use of the literary medium. That is chiefly because in him the cleavage

between art and life is of a minimal nature. In a Tolstoyan novel it is never the division but always the unity of art and life which makes for illumination. This novel, bristling with significant choices and crucial acts, teeming with dramatic motives, is not articulated through a plot as we commonly know it in fiction; one might say that in a sense there are no plots in Tolstoy but simply the unquestioned and unalterable process of life itself; such is the astonishing immediacy with which he possesses his characters that he can dispense with manipulative techniques, as he dispenses with the belletristic devices of exaggeration, distortion, and dissimulation. The fable, that specifically literary contrivance, or anything else which is merely invented or made up to suit the occasion, is very rarely found in his work. Nor is style an element of composition of which he is especially aware; he has no interest in language as such; he is the enemy of rhetoric and every kind of artifice and virtuosity. The conception of writing as of something calculated and constructed—a conception, first formulated explicitly by Edgar Allan Poe, upon which literary culture has become more and more dependent—is entirely foreign to Tolstoy.

All that is of a piece, of course, with his unique attitude toward literature, unique, that is, for a writer of modern times. For Tolstoy continually dissociated himself from literature whether considered matter-of-factly, as a profession like any other, or ideally as an autonomous way of life, a complete fate in the sense in which the French writers of Flaubert's generation conceived of it. In his youth a soldier who saw war at first hand, the proprietor and manager of Yasnaya Polyana, a husband and father not as other men are husbands and fathers but in what might be described as a programmatic and even militant fashion, and subsequently a religious philosopher and the head of a sect, he was a writer through all the years—a writer, but never a litterateur, the very idea repelled him. The litterateur performs a function imposed by the social division of labor, and inevitably he pays the price of his specialization by accepting and even applauding his own one-sidedness and conceit, his noncommitted state as witness and observer, and the necessity under which he labors of preying upon life for the themes that it yields. It is with pride that Tolstoy exempted Lermontov and himself from the class of "men of letters" while commiserating with Turgenev and Goncharov for being so much of it; and in his *Reminiscences of Tolstoy* Gorky

remarks that he spoke of literature but rarely and little, "as if it were something alien to him."

To account for that attitude by tracing it back to Tolstoy's aristocratic status, as if he disdained to identify himself with a plebeian profession, is to take much too simple a view of his personality. The point is, rather, that from the very first Tolstoy instinctively recognized the essential insufficiency and makeshift character of the narrowly aesthetic outlook, of the purely artistic appropriation of the world. His personality was built on too broad a frame to fit into an aesthetic mold, and he denied that art was anything more than the ornament and charm of life. He came of age at a time when the social group to which he belonged had not yet been thoroughly exposed to the ravages of the division of labor, when men of his stamp could still resist the dubious consolations it brings in its train. Endowed with enormous energies, possessed of boundless egoism and of an equally boundless power of conscience, he was capable, in Leo Shestov's phrase, of destroying and creating worlds, and before he was quite twenty-seven years old he had the audacity to declare his ambition, writing it all solemnly down in his diary, of becoming the founder of "a new religion corresponding with the present state of mankind; the religion of Christ but purged of dogmas and mysticism—a practical religion, not promising future bliss but giving bliss on earth." No wonder, then, that while approaching the task of mastering the literary medium with the utmost seriousness, and prizing that mastery as a beautiful accomplishment, he could not but dismiss the pieties of art as trivial compared with the question he faced from the very beginning, the question he so heroically sought to answer even in his most elemental creations, in which he seems to us to move through the natural world with splendid and miraculous ease, more fully at home there than any other literary artist. Yet even in those creations the very same question appears now in a manifest and now in a latent fashion, always the same question: How to live, what to do?

In 1880, when Turgenev visited Yasnaya Polyana after a long estrangement, he wrote a letter bemoaning Tolstoy's apparent desertion of art. "I, for instance, am considered an artist," he said, "but what am I compared with him? In contemporary European literature he has no equal. . . . But what is one to do with him. He has plunged headlong

into another sphere: he has surrounded himself with Bibles and Gospels in all languages, and has written a whole heap of papers. He has a trunk full of these mystical ethics and of various pseudo-interpretations. He read me some of it, which I simply do not understand. . . . I told him, 'That is not the real thing'; but he replied: 'It is just the real thing'. . . . Very probably he will give nothing more to literature, or if he reappears it will be with that trunk." Turgenev was wrong. Tolstoy gave a great deal more to literature, and it is out of that same trunk, so offensive in the eyes of the accomplished man of letters, that he brought forth such masterpieces as *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* and *Master and Man*, plays like *The Power of Darkness*, also many popular tales which, stripped of all ornament, have an essential force and grace of their own, and together with much that is abstract and over-rationalized, not a few expository works, like *What Then Must We Do?*, which belong with the most powerful revolutionary writings of the modern age. For it is not for nothing that Tolstoy was always rummaging in that black trunk. At the bottom of it, underneath a heap of old papers, there lay a little *mana*-object, a little green twig which he carried with him through the years, a twig of which he was told at the age of five by his brother Nicholas—that it was buried by the road at the edge of a certain ravine and that on it was inscribed the secret by means of which "all men would cease suffering misfortunes, leave off quarreling and being angry, and become continuously happy." The legend of the green twig was part of a game played by the Tolstoy children, called the Ant-Brothers, which consisted of crawling under chairs screened off by shawls and cuddling together in the dark. Tolstoy asked to be buried on the very spot at the edge of the ravine at Yasnaya Polyana which he loved because of its association with the imaginary green twig and the ideal of human brotherhood. And when he was an old man he wrote that "the idea of ant-brothers lovingly clinging to one another, though not under two arm-chairs curtained by shawls but of all mankind under the wide dome of heaven, has remained unaltered in me. As I then believed that there existed a little green twig whereon was written the message which would destroy all evil in men and give them universal welfare, so I now believe that such truth exists and will be revealed to men and will give them all it promises." It is clear that the change in Tolstoy by which Turgenev was so appalled was entirely natural, was

presupposed by all the conditions of his development and of his creative consciousness. In the total Tolstoyan perspective the black trunk of his old age represents exactly the same thing as the green twig of his childhood.

Even the crude heresies he expounded in *What is Art?* lose much of their offensiveness in that perspective. In itself when examined without reference to the author's compelling grasp of the central and most fearful problems of human existence, the argument of that book strikes us as a wilful inflation of the idea of moral utility at the expense of the values of the imagination. But actually the fault of the argument is not that it is wholly implausible—as a matter of fact, it is of long and reputable lineage in the history of culture—as that it is advanced recklessly and with a logic at once narrow and excessive; the Tolstoyan insight is here vitiated in the same way as the insight into sexual relations is vitiated in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Still, both works, the onslaught on modern love and marriage as well as the onslaught on the fetishism of art to which the modern sensibility has succumbed, are significantly expressive of Tolstoy's spiritual crisis—a crisis badly understood by many people, who take it as a phenomenon disruptive of his creative power despite the fact that, in the last analysis, it is impossible to speak of two Tolstoys, the creative and the noncreative, for there is no real discontinuity in his career. Though there is a contradiction between the artist and the moralist in him, his personality retains its basic unity, transcending all contradictions. Boris Eichenbaum, one of the very best of Tolstoy's Russian critics, has observed that the spiritual crisis did not operate to disrupt his art because it was a crisis internally not externally determined, the prerequisite of a new act of cognition through which he sought to re-arm his genius and to ascertain the possibility of new creative beginnings. Thus *My Confession*, with which Tolstoy's later period opens and which appeared immediately after *Anna Karenina*, is unmistakably a work of the imagination and at the same time a mighty feat of consciousness.

Six years after writing *What is Art?* Tolstoy finished *Hadji Murad* (1904), one of the finest *nouvelles* in the Russian language and a model of narrative skill and objective artistry. Is not the song of the night-ingales, that song of life and death which bursts into ecstasy at dawn on the day when Hadji Murad attempts to regain his freedom, the very

same song which rises in that marvelously sensual scene in *Family Happiness*, a scene bathed in sunlight, when Masha, surprising Sergey Mikhaylych in the cherry orchard, enjoys for the first time the full savor of her youthful love? *Hadji Murad* was written not less than forty-five years after *Family Happiness*. And in *The Devil*—a moral tale, the product, like *The Kreutzer Sonata*, of Tolstoy's most sectarian period and extremest assertion of dogmatic asceticism—what we remember best is not Eugene Irtenev's torments of conscience, his efforts to subdue his passion, but precisely the description of his carnal meetings in the sun-drenched woods with Stepanida, the fresh and strong peasant-girl with full breasts and bright black eyes. The truth is that in the struggle between the old moralist and the old magician in Tolstoy both gave as good as they got.

The rationalist and anti-Romantic in Tolstoy. Sources in the eighteenth century. Divergence from the intelligentsia. Creative method. Tolstoy has been described as the least neurotic of all the great Russians, and by the same token he can be said to be more committed than any of them to the rational understanding and ordering of life and to the throwing off of romantic illusions. Unlike Dostoevsky, he owes nothing either to the so-called natural school of Gogol or to the Romantic movement in western literature. The school of Gogol is a school of morbidity, whereas Tolstoy is above all an artist of the normal—the normal, however, so intensified that it acquires a poetical truth and an emotional fullness which we are astounded to discover in the ordinary situations of life. Analysis is always at the center of the Tolstoyan creation. It is the sort of analysis, however, which has little in common with the analytical modes of such novelists as Dostoevsky and Proust, for example, both characteristically modern though in entirely different ways. While in their work analysis is precipitated mainly by deviations from the norm, from the broad standard of human conduct, in Tolstoy the analysis remains in line with that standard, is in fact inconceivable apart from it. Dostoevsky's "underground" man, who is a bundle of plebeian resentments, is unimaginable in a Tolstoyan novel. Even in Tolstoy's treatment of death there is nothing actually morbid—certainly not in the description of the death of Prince Andrey in *War and Peace* and of Nikolay Levin in *Anna Karenina*. As for *The Death of Ivan*

Ilyich, that story would be utterly pointless if we were to see Ivan Ilyich as a special type and what happened to him as anything out of the ordinary. Ivan Ilyich is Everyman, and the state of absolute solitude into which he falls as his life ebbs away is the existential norm, the inescapable realization of mortality. Nothing could be more mistaken than the idea that Tolstoy's concern with death is an abnormal trait. On the contrary, if anything it is a supernormal trait, for the intensity of his concern with death is proportionate to the intensity of his concern with life. Of Tolstoy it can be said that he truly lived his life, and for that very reason he was so tormented by the thought of dying. It was a literal thought, physical through and through, a vital manifestation of the simplicity with which he grasped man's life in the world. This simplicity is of a metaphysical nature, and in it, as one Russian critic has remarked, you find the essence of Tolstoy's world-view, the energizing and generalizing formula that served him as the means unifying the diverse motives of his intellectual and literary experience. It is due to this metaphysical simplicity that he was unable to come to terms with any system of dogmatic theology and that in the end, despite all his efforts to retain it, he was compelled to exclude even the idea of God from his own system of rationalized religion. Thus all notions of immortality seemed absurd to Tolstoy, and his scheme of salvation was entirely calculated to make men happy here and now. It is reported of Thoreau that when he lay dying his answer to all talk of the hereafter was "one world at a time." That is the sort of answer with which Tolstoy's mentality is wholly in accord.

The way in which his rationalism enters his art is shown in his analysis of character, an analysis which leaves nothing undefined, nothing unexplained. That systematization of ambiguity which marks the modern novel is organically alien to Tolstoy. Given the framework in which his characters move we are told everything that we need to know or want to know about them. The tangled intimate life, the underside of their consciousness, their author is not concerned with: he sets them up in the known world and sees them through their predicaments, however irksome and baffling, without ever depriving them of the rationality which supports their existence. For just as in Tolstoy's religiosity there is no element of mysticism, so in his creative art there is no element of mystery.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Tolstoy did not pass through the school of Romanticism, and perhaps that is the reason he never hesitated to strike out the dark areas in the space in which he outlined his leading figures. He has few links with the literary culture evolved in Russia after 1820; the fact is that he has more in common with his literary grandfathers than with his literary fathers. Insofar as he has any literary affiliations at all they go back to the eighteenth century, to Rousseau, to Sterne, to the French classical drama, and in Russia to the period of Karamzin, Zhukovsky, Novikov, and Radichev. He has their robustness and skepticism. His quarrels with Turgenev, his inability to get on with the liberal and radical writers grouped around the *Contemporary*, a Petersburg periodical edited by the poet Nekrasov in which Tolstoy's first stories were published, are explained not so much by personal factors, such as his intractability of temper, as by the extreme differences between the conditions of his development and those of the Russian intelligentsia, whose rise coincides with the appearance of the plebeian on the literary scene. Tolstoy's family background was archaistic, not in the sense of provincial backwardness, but in the sense of the deliberate and even stylized attempt made by his family—more particularly his father—to preserve at Yasnaya Polyana the patriarchal traditions of the Russian nobility of the eighteenth century. It was a conscious and militant archaism directed against the “new” civilization of Petersburg, with its state-bureaucracy and merchant princes. The young Tolstoy was scornful of the “theories” and “convictions” held by the writers he met in Petersburg in the 1850's; instead of putting his trust in “theories” and “convictions” he relied on those Franklinesque rules and precepts of conduct with which he filled his diaries—rules and precepts he deduced from his idea of unalterable “moral instincts.” In Nekrasov's circle he was regarded as a “wild man,” a “troglydyte”; and in the early 1860's, when he set out on his second European tour, Nekrasov and his friends hoped that he would return in a mood of agreement with their notions of education and historical progress. Nothing came of it, of course, for he returned armed with more of those “simplifications” that cut under their assumptions. But if the Westernizers found no comfort in Tolstoy, neither did the Slavophiles. The latter's ideology, with its forced and artificial doctrine of superiority to the West, was also aligned with plebeian social tasks; at

bottom it represented the discomfiture of a small and weak plebeian class in a semifeudal society, a discomfiture idealized through national messianism. It was an obscurantist ideology incompatible with Tolstoy's belief in self-improvement and in the possibility of human perfection. Moreover, in Tolstoy's approach to western culture there was no distress, no anger, no hostility. He was never put off by it, for he considered European culture to be a neutral sphere the products of which he could appropriate at will, and in any order he pleased, without in the least committing himself to its inner logic. He felt no more committed by his use of western ideas than the French-speaking gentry in *War and Peace* feel obligated to import the social institutions of France along with its language. Thus Tolstoy was able to sort out western tendencies to suit himself, as in *War and Peace*, where he is to some extent indebted for his conception of Napoleon to certain French publicists of the 1850's and 60's, who in their endeavor to deflate the pretensions of Napoleon III went so far in their polemics as also to blot out the image of his illustrious ancestor. Again, in that novel he is partly indebted for his so-called organic idea of war to Proudhon's book *La Guerre et la Paix*, which came out in a Russian translation in 1864. (Tolstoy had met Proudhon in Brussels in March, 1861.) And the arbitrary way in which he helped himself to the ideas of western thinkers is shown by the fact that he entirely ignored Proudhon's enthusiastic affirmation of Napoleon's historical role. The West was the realm of the city, a realm so strange to Tolstoy that he could regard it as neutral territory. The city was essentially unreal to him; he believed in the existence solely of the landowners and of the peasants. The contrast between Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, which Merezhkovsky and after him Thomas Mann have presented in terms of the abstract typology of the "man of spirit" as against the "man of nature," is more relevantly analyzed in terms of the contradiction between city and country, between the alienated intellectual proletariat of the city and the unalienated patriciate-peasantry of the country.

Much has been written concerning the influence of Rousseau on Tolstoy, but here again it is necessary to keep in mind that in western literature we perceive the Rousseauist ideas through the colored screen of Romanticism while in Tolstoy Rousseau survives through his rationalism no less than through his sensibility. In point of fact, the Rous-

seauist cult of nature is operative in Tolstoy in a manner that leads toward realism, as is seen in his Caucasian tales, for instance. If these tales now seem romantic to us, that is largely because of the picturesque material of which they are composed. A narrative like *The Cossacks* is actually turned in a tendentious way against the tradition of "Caucasian romanticism" in Russian literature—the tradition of Pushkin, Lermontov, and Marlinsky. Olenin, the protagonist of *The Cossacks*, is so little of a Romantic hero that he is incapable of dominating even his own story; the impression of his personality is dissipated as the attention shifts to the Cossack lad Lukashka, to Daddy Eroshka, and to the girl Marianka. Think what Chateaubriand would have made of a heroine like Marianka. In Tolstoy, however, she is portrayed in an authentically natural style, with all the calm strength, unawareness of subjective values, and indifference of a primitive human being. Though she is a "child of nature" and therefore an object of poetical associations, she is seen much too soberly to arouse those high-flown sentiments which "nature" inspires in Romantic poets like Novalis or even the Goethe of *Werther*. Where the Romantics convert nature into a solace for the trials of civilization, into a theater of lyrical idleness and noble pleasures, Tolstoy identifies nature with work, independence, self-possession.

Compared with Pierre, Prince Andrey, or Levin, Olenin is a weak hero, but he is important in that in his reflections he sums up everything which went into the making of the early Tolstoy and which was in later years given a religious twist and offered as a doctrine of world-salvation. The primacy which the issue of happiness assumes in Olenin's thoughts is the key to his Tolstoyan nature. "Happiness is this," he said to himself, "happiness lies in living for others. That is evident. The desire for happiness is innate in every man; therefore it is legitimate. When trying to satisfy it selfishly—that is, by seeking for oneself riches, fame, comforts, or love—it may happen that circumstances arise which make it impossible to satisfy these desires. It follows that it is these desires which are illegitimate, but not the need for happiness. But what desires can always be satisfied despite external circumstances? What are they? Love, self-sacrifice." In these few sentences we get the quintessence of the Tolstoyan mentality: the belief that ultimate truth can be arrived at through common-sense reasoning, the

utilitarian justification of the values of love and self-sacrifice and their release from all otherworldly sanctions, the striving for the simplification of existence which takes the form of a return to a life closer to nature—a return, however, involving a self-consciousness and a constant recourse to reason that augurs ill for the success of any such experiment.

Tolstoy's art is so frequently spoken of as "organic" that one is likely to overlook the rationalistic structure on which it is based. This structure consists of successive layers of concrete details, physical and psychological, driven into place and held together by a generalization or dogma. Thus in *The Cossacks* the generalization is the idea of the return to nature; in *Two Hussars* it is the superiority of the elder Turbin to the younger, that is to say, of the more naive times of the past to the "modern" period. (The original title of the story was *Father and Son*.) The binding dogma in *Family Happiness* is the instability and deceptiveness of love as compared with a sound family life and the rearing of children in insuring the happiness of a married couple. Yet the didacticism of such ideas seldom interferes with our enjoyment of the Tolstoyan fiction. For the wonderful thing about it is its tissue of detail, the tenacious way in which it holds together, as if it were a glutinous substance, and its incomparable rightness and truthfulness.

Parallelism of construction is another leading characteristic of the Tolstoyan method. In *War and Peace*, in the chronicle of the lives of the Bolkonsky and Rostov families, this parallelism is not devised dramatically, as a deliberate contrast, but in other narratives it is driven toward a stark comparison, as between Anna and Vronsky on the one hand and Kitty and Levin on the other in *Anna Karenina*, or between two generations in *Two Hussars*, or between Lukashka and Olenin in *The Cossacks*. One writer on Tolstoy put it very well when he said that in the Tolstoyan novel all ideas and phenomena exist in pairs. Comparison is inherent in his method.

His early *nouvelles* can certainly be read and appreciated without reference to their historical context, to the ideological differences between him and his contemporaries which set him off to confound them with more proofs of his disdain for their "progressive" opinions. Still, the origin of *Family Happiness* in the quarrels of the period is worth recalling. At that time (in the 1850's) public opinion was much exercised over the question of free love and the emancipation of women;

George Sand was a novelist widely read in intellectual circles, and of course most advanced people agreed with George Sand's libertarian solution of the question. Not so Tolstoy, who opposed all such tendencies, for he regarded marriage and family life as the foundations of society. Thus *Family Happiness*, with its denigration of love and of equal rights for women, was conceived, quite apart from its personal genesis in Tolstoy's affair with Valerya Arsenev, as a polemical rejoinder to George Sand, then adored by virtually all the Petersburg writers, including Dostoevsky.

The faith in family life is integral of Tolstoy. It has the deepest psychological roots in his private history, and socially it exemplifies his championship of patriarchal relations. It is a necessary part of his archaistic outlook, which in later life was transformed into a special kind of radicalism, genuinely revolutionary in some of its aspects and thoroughly archaistic in others. *War and Peace* is as much a chronicle of certain families as an historical novel. The historical sense is not really native to Tolstoy. His interest in the period of 1812 is peculiarly his own, derived from his interest in the story of his own family. He began work on *Anna Karenina* after failing in the attempt to write another historical novel, a sequel to *War and Peace*. And *Anna Karenina* is of course the novel in which his inordinate concern with marriage and family life receives its fullest expression.

The existential center of the Tolstoyan art. Tolstoy as the last of the unalienated artists. So much has been made here of the rationalism of Tolstoy that it becomes necessary to explain how his art is saved from the ill effects of it. Art and reason are not naturally congruous with one another, and many a work of the imagination has miscarried because of an excess of logic. "There may be a system of logic; a system of being there can never be," said Kierkegaard. And art is above all a recreation of individual being; the system-maker must perforce abstract from the real world while the artist, if he is true to his medium, recoils from the process of abstraction because it is precisely the irreducible quality of life, its multiple divulgements in all their uniqueness and singularity, which provoke his imagination.

Now there is only one novel of Tolstoy's that might be described as a casualty of his rationalism, and that is *Resurrection*. The greater

part of his fiction is existentially centered in a concrete inwardness and subjectivity by which it gains its quality of genius. In this sense it becomes possible to say that Tolstoy is much more a novelist of life and death than he is of good and evil—good and evil are not categories of existence but of moral analysis. And the binding dogmas or ideas of Tolstoy's fiction are not in contradiction with its existential sense; on the contrary, their interaction is a triumph of creative tact and proof of the essential wholeness of Tolstoy's nature. The Tolstoyan characters grasp their lives through their total personalities, not merely through their intellects. Their experience is full of moments of shock, of radical choice and decision, when they confront themselves in the terrible and inevitable aloneness of their being. To mention but one of innumerable instances of such spiritual confrontation, there is the moment in *Anna Karenina* when Anna's husband begins to suspect her relation to Vronsky. That is the moment when the accepted and taken-for-granted falls to pieces, when the carefully built-up credibility of the world is torn apart by a revelation of its underlying irrationality. For according to Alexey Alexandrovitch's ideas one ought to have confidence in one's wife because jealousy was insulting to oneself as well as to her. He had never really asked himself why his wife deserved such confidence and why he believed that she would always love him. But now, though he still felt that jealousy was a bad and shameful state, "he also felt that he was standing face to face with something illogical and irrational, and did not know what was to be done. Alexey Alexandrovitch was standing face to face with life, with the possibility of his wife's loving some one other than himself, and this seemed to him very irrational and incomprehensible because it was life itself. All his life Alexey Alexandrovitch had lived and worked in official spheres, having to do with the reflection of life. And every time he stumbled against life itself he had shrunk away from it. Now he experienced a feeling akin to that of a man who, while calmly crossing a precipice by a bridge, should suddenly discover that the bridge is broken, and that there is a chasm below. That chasm was life itself, the bridge that artificial life in which Alexey Alexandrovitch had lived. For the first time the question presented itself to him of the possibility of his wife's loving some one else, and he was horrified at it."

It is exactly this "standing face to face with life," and the realization that there are things in it that are irreducible and incomprehensible,

which drew Tolstoy toward the theme of death. Again and again he returned to this theme, out of a fear of death which is really the highest form of courage. Most people put death out of their minds because they cannot bear to think of it. Gorky reports that Tolstoy once said to him that "if a man has learned to think, no matter what he may think about, he is always thinking of his own death. All philosophers were like that. And what truths can there be, if there is death?" That is a statement of despair and nihilism the paradox of which is that it springs from the depths of Tolstoy's existential feeling of life; and this is because the despair and nihilism spring not from the renunciation but from the affirmation of life; Tolstoy never gave up the search for an all-embracing truth, for a rational justification of man's existence on the earth.

The fact is that Tolstoy was at bottom so sure in his mastery of life and so firm in his inner feeling of security that he could afford to deal intimately with death. Consider the difference in this respect between him and Franz Kafka, another novelist of the existential mode. In Kafka the theme of death is absent, not because of strength but rather because of neurotic weakness. He was ridden by a conviction, as he himself defined it, of "complete helplessness," and baffled by the seeming impossibility of solving even the most elementary problems of living, he could not look beyond life into the face of death. He wrote: "Without ancestors, without marriage, without progeny, with an unbridled desire for ancestors, marriage, and progeny. All stretch out their hands towards me: ancestors, marriage, and progeny, but from a point far too remote from me." That is the complaint of an utterly alienated man, without a past and without a future. Tolstoy, on the other hand, was attached with the strongest bonds to the patrician-peasant life of Yasnaya Polyana, he was in possession of the world and of his own humanity. His secret is that he is the last of the unalienated artists. Hence it is necessary to insist on the differences not so much between him and other artists generally as between him and the modern breed of alienated artists. It is thanks to this unalienated condition that he is capable of moving us powerfully when describing the simplest, the most ordinary and therefore in their own way also the gravest occasions of life—occasions that the alienated artist can approach only from a distance, through flat naturalistic techniques, or through immense subtleties of analysis, or through the transposition of his subject onto the plane of myth and fantasy.

But, of course, even Tolstoy, being a man of the nineteenth century, could not finally escape the blight of alienation. In his lifetime Russian society disintegrated; he witnessed the passing of the old society of status and its replacement by a cruelly impersonal system of bourgeois relations. Tolstoy resisted the catastrophic ruin of the traditional order by straining all the powers of his reason to discover a way out. His so-called conversion is the most dramatic and desperate episode in his stubborn and protracted struggle against alienation. His attack on civilization is essentially an attack on the conditions that make for alienation. The doctrine of Christian anarchism, developed after his conversion, reflects, as Lenin put it, "the accumulated hate, the ripened aspiration for a better life, the desire to throw off the past—and also the immaturity, the dreamy contemplativeness, the political inexperience, and the revolutionary flabbiness of the villages." Still, the point of that doctrine lies not in its religious content, which is very small indeed, but rather in its formulation of a social ideal and of a utopian social program.

DOSTOEVSKY IN "THE POSSESSED"

The tendency of every age is to bury as many classics as it revives. If unable to discover our own urgent meanings in a creation of the past, we hope to find ample redress in its competitive neighbors. A masterpiece cannot be produced once and for all; it must be constantly reproduced. Its first author is a man. Its later ones—time, social time, history.

To be means to recur. In the struggle for survival among works of art those prove themselves the fittest that recur most often. In order to impress itself on our imagination, a work of art must be capable of bending its wondrous, its immortal head to the yoke of the mortal and finite—that is, the contemporary, which is never more than an emphasis, a one-sided projection of the real. The past retains its vitality in so far as it impersonates the present, either in its aversions or ideals; in the same way a classic work renews itself by impersonating a modern one.

If of all the novels of Dostoevsky it is *The Possessed* which now seems closest to us, arousing a curiosity and expectation that belong

peculiarly to the age we live in, it is because it deals with problems of radical ideology and behavior that have become familiar to us through our own experience. It is a work at once unique and typically Dostoevskyeian. Shaken by the Karamazov fury and full of Dostoevsky's moral and religious obsessions, it is at the same time the one novel in which he explicitly concerned himself with political ideas and with the revolutionary movement.

The fact is that it really contains two novels. It was begun as an openly "tendencious" study of the evolution of ideas from fathers to sons, of the development of the liberal idealism of the thirties and forties of the past century into the nihilism and socialism of the sixties and seventies; but Dostoevsky encountered such difficulties in its writing that he finally incorporated into it many conceptions from *The Life of a Great Sinner*, a projected novel in several volumes which was to be his major effort on the subject of atheism. For that reason *The Possessed* might be said to have two sets of characters, one sacred and one profane, one metaphysical and one empirical—the group around Stavrogin, the great sinner, and the group around the Verhovenskys, father and son, who are defined socially and politically. While one set commits sins, the other commits crimes. Externally, in his melodramatic, sinister attractiveness and in the Byronic stress given to his personal relations, Stavrogin derives from early European Romanticism, but in his moral sensuality, in his craving for remorse and martyrdom, he is an authentic member of the Karamazov family. He is doubled within himself as well as through Shatov and Kirillov, his satellites in the story. Shatov represents his Russian, national-messianic side, and Kirillov his "religious atheism"—his experiments with God and eventual destruction of Him to make room for the man-god who kills himself to assert his divinity and prove it.

There can be no doubt that the introduction of Stavrogin into *The Possessed*, which in its first draft relied exclusively on the Verhovenskys for its interest, gives the novel a psychological depth and moral propulsion that brings it up to the level of Dostoevsky's best work in his later period, the period that opens with the appearance of *Notes from Underground* in 1864. For with the introduction of Stavrogin Dostoevsky was able to double the theme of his novel, thus allowing sin and crime, religion and politics, to engage in a mutual criticism of

each other. It should be added, however, that the two themes are not fused with entire success. Stavrogin is at times somewhat gratuitously implicated in the younger Verhovensky's political maneuvers; the link between them is often artificial, giving rise to superfluous intricacies of structure and episode. The plot, in part improvised, is insufficiently unified. But this defect is more than made up for—and precisely from the standpoint of plot, always so crucially important in Dostoevsky's creative scheme—by the opportunity provided in Stavrogin's accession to the role of principal hero for the employment of that technique of mystification and suspense, of narrative progression by means of a series of tumultuous scenes and revelations of an agonizing nature, on which the Dostoevskye novel depends for its essential effects, its atmosphere of scandal and monstrous rumor, its tensions of thought no less than of act and circumstance resolved only when the ultimate catastrophe overwhelms the characters and rolls up the plot. Now Stavrogin, whose character is an enigma toward the solution of which everything in the novel converges, is the kind of central figure perfectly suited to this imaginative scheme.

If in the past social critics dismissed *The Possessed* as a vicious caricature of the socialist movement, today the emergence of Stalinism compels a revision of that judgment. Its peculiar "timeliness" flows from the fact that the motives, actions, and ideas of the revolutionaries in it are so ambiguous, so imbedded in equivocation, as to suggest those astonishing negations of the socialist ideal which have come into existence in Soviet Russia. Emptied of principle, the Communist movement of our time has converted politics into an art of illusion. Stalin's "socialism" is devoid of all norms; never acting in its own name, it can permit itself every crime and every duplicity. Its first rule is to deny its own identity and to keep itself solvent by drawing on the ideological credit of those revolutionary traditions and heroic struggles for freedom which its brutal totalitarianism repudiates in their very essence. In public the rapacious bureaucrat appears masked as the spokesman of the oppressed and exploited. Marxism, and not the savage doctrine of preserving and extending at all costs the power of the usurpers, is his official philosophy. It is a similar element of counterfeit, of a vertiginous interplay of reality and appearance, which makes Dostoevsky's story so prophetic in the light of what we know of the fate of the Russian revolution.

Thus in its Verhovensky parts the novel reminds us of the most recent political phenomena; and it is not by chance that on the occasion of the Moscow trials the world press unanimously recalled to its readers the name of Dostoevsky, the great nay-sayer to the revolution. This occurred twenty years after Dostoevsky's Russia—that realm of wood and dark furious souls—had been ostensibly demolished and a new harmonious society erected on its ruins. The principles of science and reason had triumphed, we were told. But now the creations of a novelist who considered these same principles to be the spawn of Satan were invoked to explain events which science and reason had apparently found inexplicable. It is not worthwhile, however, to examine *The Possessed* in order to appeal to the "Slav soul" for the divulgence of racial or national secrets. The "Slav soul" never explained anything. That swollen concept is the product of the historical romanticism of the Slavophil movement, which substituted brooding about history for making it. Dostoevsky, too, "brooded" in the Slavophil fashion, but that by no means exhausts his contribution to letters. As a supra-historical essence the "Slav soul" is impartial in its testimony, drawing no distinctions between accusers and accused, or between oppressors and oppressed. If you make the unfathomable perversity of the Slav nature your premise, then logically your conclusion cannot exclude any explanation, no matter how wild and incredible. Hence it is futile to look to the author of *The Possessed* for revelations about specific historical events, such as the Moscow trials; but much can be learned from a study of the interrelationships between his work and the contending forces that he combined into such extraordinary patterns. Although this analyst of contradictions, who was ever vibrating between faith and heresy, made the revolutionary the object of his venom, there is a real affinity between them.

"In everything and everywhere," he wrote to his friend Maikov in 1867, "I go to the very last limit; all my life long I have gone beyond the limit." Whatever his conscious convictions about orthodoxy, monarchy, and the Russian folk, his temperament and the profoundly dissident if not daemonic force of his imaginative dialectic transformed him into a revolutionary influence in Russian life and culture. And it is precisely this "going beyond the limit" that explains why in spite of himself he became, in his very resistance to the revolution, its herald

and prophet. Into his Christianity, too, he injected, as Lunacharsky noted, "the maximum of his revolutionism." Thus Russian orthodoxy found in him a dangerous advocate and protector, for his championship of it took the form of ideas so apocalyptic as to disintegrate its traditional and institutional sanctions. There is no stasis in Dostoevsky's religiosity but rather a dynamism destructive of dogma and seeking fulfilment in the triumph of Christian love and truth in the human world. To be sure, this did not escape the notice of the more subtle partisans of orthodoxy, such as Konstantin Leontiev, an original thinker and religious philosopher who valued in religion its dogma more than its ethics. Leontiev accused Dostoevsky of deviating from Christianity in the spirit of Western humanism and of promoting an "earthly eudaemonism with Christian nuances." He wrote that "in the eyes of a Christian these hopes (of brotherhood and love) contradict the direct and very clear prophecy of the Gospels concerning the worsening of human relations right to the very end of the world. Brotherhood and humanitarianism are of course recommended by the New Testament for the saving of the individual soul; but in the New Testament it nowhere says that through these humanitarian efforts man will ultimately come to peace and love—*Christ did not promise us that . . . that is not true! . . .* Christ told or advised us to love our neighbor *in the name of God*; but on the other hand he prophesied that many will not obey Him. It is in this sense exactly that the new European humanism and the humanism of Christianity are clearly antithetical, and very difficult to reconcile." From the standpoint of orthodoxy Leontiev was doubtless right in his strictures. The truth is that Dostoevsky, despite the commitment of his will to reactionary principles, was at bottom so deeply involved in the spiritual and social radicalism of the Russian intelligentsia that he could not help attempting to break through the inner rigidity of the orthodox tradition toward a dynamic idea of salvation; and in a certain sense what this idea came to is little more than an anarcho-Christian version of that "religion of humanity" which continued to inspire the intelligentsia throughout the nineteenth century and by which Dostoevsky himself was inspired in his youth, when together with Belinsky, Petrashevsky and other social enthusiasts of the 1840's, he took for his guides and mentors such heretical lovers of mankind as Rousseau, Fourier, Saint-Simon, and George Sand.

For if analysed in terms of his social milieu and affiliations, it becomes clear at once that Dostoevsky was the spokesman not of the *narod*—that is the mass of the Russian people, the peasantry—with which he fancied himself to stand in a relation of congenial intimacy, largely of his own imagining, but of the intelligentsia, a class so precariously situated in Russian society, so tightly squeezed between the feudal-aristocratic power above it and the elemental power of the peasant multitude below it, that it had virtually no social space in which to move and grow. It is this stiflingly narrow basis of the Russian intelligentsia which in some ways accounts for its extremes of thought and behavior—the deadly seriousness of its approach to theoretical and ideological issues, its moods of slackness, dreaminess, and passivity alternating with moods of political intransigence and boundless enthusiasm, its fanaticism and tendencies to schism and heresy-hunting combined with tendencies to self-depreciation and self-hatred. In Dostoevsky these characteristics of the Russian intellectuals are summed up to perfection, and that despite his continual quarrels with them, his nagging criticism of them for their alleged estrangement from the people. By his nagging criticism and contempt, which is really self-contempt, he is all the more identified as one of them. In common with many Russian intellectuals he regarded the mysterious power of the *narod* with a fascination that is precisely the negative of their self-contempt and awareness of their own helplessness. Dostoevsky, by idealizing submission, suffering, and the necessity of bowing down before the people, turned this very negativity inside out, endeavoring to convert it into a positive value. But his ambivalent nature did not permit his losing himself in the contemplation of this false though gratifying luster of the positive.

The fact is that it is not in the construction of harmonies but in the uncovering of antinomies that his genius found its deeper expression. His children of light, like Sonia Marmeladov, Myshkin, Alyosha, and Zossima, are passionately and intellectually inferior to his children of darkness, such as Svidrigailov, Raskolnikov, Stavrogin, Kirillov, and Ivan Karamazov. (Myshkin, in whom his author aspired to create the image of a “positively good man,” is no doubt the most alive of the children of light, though in saying this one must consider the telling fact that it is primarily from his malaise rather than from his goodness

that he gains his vitality as a character.) Ivan Karamazov, transcending his novelistic framework, is a world-historical creation that overshadows all the saints and pseudo-saints in the Dostoevskye canon; and one cannot but agree with D. S. Mirsky, who, in discriminating between the lesser and the greater Dostoevsky, notes that his tragedies are "irreducible tragedies that cannot be solved or pacified. . . . His harmonies and solutions are on a shallower level than his conflicts and tragedies. . . . His Christianity . . . did not reach the ultimate depths of his soul." The distinction drawn by Mirsky, and indirectly supported from a theological standpoint by Leontiev, is essential to an accurate understanding of Dostoevsky's relationship to historical Christianity, though nowadays, of course, critics friendly to the new religiosity and aware of the uses to which the example of Dostoevsky may be put in the struggle against secular ideas, tend to ignore an insight so damaging to the cause of tradition and dogma.

Excluded from the sphere of practical life and confronted by the need of thinking their way out from the historical impasse into which backward and calamitous conditions had driven their nation, the Russian intellectuals lived in and through ideas. This almost predacious feeling for ideas and relatedness to them is actualized in Dostoevsky as in no other Russian novelist. To his characters ideas are a source of suffering. Such people are unknown in countries like America, where social tension is at a relatively low point and where, in consequence, the idea counts for very little and is usually dismissed as "theory." Only in a society whose contradictions are unbridled in temper do ideas become a matter of life and death. Such is the historical secret of that Russian intensity which Western critics find so admirable. Alyosha Karamazov, for example, was convinced "as soon as he reflected seriously, of the existence of God and immortality, and at once he said to himself: 'I want to exist for God, and I will accept no compromise.'" In the same way, adds Dostoevsky, "if he had decided that God and immortality did not exist he would at once have become an atheist and a socialist." As simply as that. And in *The Possessed*, Kirillov decides that God "is necessary and must exist," but at the same time he knows that "He doesn't and He can't." "Surely," he says, "you must understand that a man with two such ideas can't go on living." Kirillov shoots himself.

In *The Possessed* it is necessary above all to distinguish between its manifest and latent meaning. A counter-revolutionary novel in its manifest intention and content, what it actually depicts in terms of felt experience is the total disintegration of the traditional order and the inevitability of its downfall. The disintegration is of the soul no less than of the social order; and if Stavrogin, with his stupefaction of ennui and loss of the sense of good and evil, represents the decomposed soul, the decomposed society is represented mainly in Verhovensky together with his followers and easy victims. Disintegration is the real theme of the novel, as it is the real theme of *A Raw Youth*, *The Brothers Karamazov* and other major works of Dostoevsky's later period. Thus in *The Possessed*, while setting out to report on the moral depravity of the revolution, Dostoevsky was nevertheless objective enough to demonstrate that Russia could not escape it. The hidden ideology of radicalism and social prophet in him would not be submerged. If it is true, as it has been repeatedly charged, that there was a good slice of the flunkey in his personal psychology, then he was the kind of flunkey, or rather super-flunkey, who even while bowing and scraping says the most outrageous things to your face. This novel, which so delighted the autocratic regime, in reality generalized its breakdown in the political sphere as well as in the sphere of values and moral experience.

In reading this novel one is never quite certain that Pyotr Verhovensky, its chief revolutionary character, is not an agent of the Czar's secret police. Even as he is engaged in preparing an insurrection, this "authorized representative" of an invisible Central Committee, which is located somewhere abroad and turns out to be a myth, describes himself as "a scoundrel of course and not a socialist." He methodically uses blackmail, slander, drunkenness, and spying to achieve his ends. But what in reality are his ends? Give him state power and you get the kind of social type who makes his way to the top in the Soviet secret police. Verhovensky's plan is to organize a network of human knots whose task is to proselytize and ramify endlessly, and "by systematic denunciation to injure the prestige of local authority, to reduce villages to confusion, to spread cynicism and scandals, together with complete disbelief in everything and an eagerness for something better, and finally, by means of fire, a pre-eminently national method, to reduce the country at a given moment, if need be, to desperation." Verhovensky

actually carries out this ingenious plan in the town where the scene of the novel is laid—an unnamed town which stands for the whole of Russia. His associate Shigalov—a character who fits Lenin's definition of the petty-bourgeois "gone mad" but who at the same time, in view of the monstrous consistency of his revolutionary-utopian logic, reminds us if not of Lenin personally then surely of Leninism as an historical phenomenon—busies himself with constructing, on paper, a new form of social organization to guarantee complete equality. Starting with the idea of attaining "unlimited freedom" in his Utopia, he soon arrives at the conclusion that what it will actually produce is "unlimited despotism." This throws him into despair, yet he insists that there can be no other solution to the problems of society. Yulia Mihailovna, a well-born and well-to-do lady, wife of the governor of the province, dreams of reconciling the irreconcilable in her own person, of uniting in the adoration of herself "the correct tone of the aristocratic salons and the free-and-easy, almost pothouse manners" of the youthful nihilists, the system of big landed property with free-thinking socialist notions. (In the unsurpassable portrait of this vain woman Dostoevsky created the model of what has since evolved into a ubiquitous social type—the wealthy and thoroughly bourgeois "friend" or "sympathizer" of the Russian revolution who in his befuddlement tries to reconcile his existing status in society with the self-conceit of playing a progressive role and being "in" on the secrets of history.) And what shall one say of Yulia Mihailovna's husband, the governor, who in his snobbish desire to associate himself with the cause of progress, can think of no other objection to the manifestoes urging the people to rebellion except that the ideas expressed in them are "premature." Verhovensky quickly and cruelly turns this objection aside by saying to him: "And how can you be an official of the government after that, when you agree to demolishing churches, and marching on Petersburg with staves, making it all simply a question of date?" Such people are the natural prey of a character like Liputin, an unwashed intriguer, at once a despot and a dreamer, who propounds the theory that there are people on whom clean linen is unseemly. Practicing petty usury, he at the same time holds forth in the language of "the universal republic and harmony of mankind." But the odd thing about him is that he is sincere.

It is exactly through such complex and conflicting motivation that the inevitability of the social breakdown is impressed on the reader's

mind. Here the impulse to be rid of a rotting order and to break loose has reach such intensity that it has become objective; penetrating into the innermost, the most differentiated cells of human psychology, it has ceased to be incompatible with degenerate habits and desires. In one scene the writer Karmazinov, a figure through whom the author mercilessly derided Turgenev, describes Russia in terms that approximate the Marxist formula of a revolutionary situation. One must bear in mind that since the intent of the novel is counter-revolutionary, the perception that "Russia as she is has no future" and that "everything here is doomed and awaiting its end" is necessarily put into the mouth of a character, presented as a pompous and conceited coward, at whom we are supposed to laugh. Yet the author makes it plain, even if through indirect means, that Karmazinov is a man of acute intelligence. And Karmazinov so truly predicts what has since come to pass that he is well worth quoting at some length in order to demonstrate how powerfully his author's observation of Russian society was engaged with reality at the very time when he was ostensibly defending this society by writing a novel exposing and satirizing its liberal and socialist enemies. Karmazinov is addressing himself to Verhovensky:

"If the Babylon there (meaning Europe) really does fall, and great will be the fall thereof . . . there's nothing to fall here in Russia, comparatively speaking. There won't be stones to fall, everything will crumble into dirt. Holy Russia has less power of resistance than anything in the world. The Russian peasantry is still held together somehow by the Russian God; but according to the latest accounts the Russian God is not to be relied upon . . . And now, what with railways, what with you . . . I've no faith in the Russian God."

"And how about the European one?"

"I don't believe in any. . . . I was shown the manifestoes here. Every one looks at them with perplexity because they are frightened at the way things are put in them, but every one is convinced of their power even if they don't admit it to themselves. Everything has been rolling downhill, and every one has known for ages that they have nothing to clutch at. I am persuaded of the success of this mysterious propaganda, if only because Russia is now pre-eminently the place in the world where anything you like may happen without any opposition. . . . Holy Russia is a country of wood, of poverty . . . and of danger, the country of ambitious beggars in the upper classes, while the immense majority live in poky little huts. She will be glad of any way to escape; you have only to present it to her. It's only the government that still means to resist, but it brandishes its cudgel in the dark and hits its

own men. Everything here is doomed and awaiting the end. Russia as she is has no future. I have become a German and am proud of it."

"But you began about the manifestoes. Tell me everything. How do you look at them?"

"Every one is afraid of them, so they must be influential. They openly unmask what is false and prove that there is nothing to lay hold of among us, and nothing to lean upon. They speak aloud while all is silent. What is most effective about them . . . is the incredible boldness with which they look the truth straight in the face. To look facts straight in the face is only possible to Russians of this generation. No, in Europe they are not yet so bold; it is a realm of stone, there there is still something to lean upon. So far as I see and am able to judge, the whole essence of the Russian revolutionary idea lies in the negation of honor. I like its being so boldly and fearlessly expressed. No, in Europe they wouldn't understand it yet, but that's just what we shall clutch at. For a Russian a sense of honor is only a superfluous burden, and it always has been a burden through all his history. The open 'right to dishonor' will attract him more than anything. . . ."

If any character in *The Possessed* personifies the negation of honor, it is of course Pyotr Verhovensky. But can it be said that he is truly representative of the Russian revolutionary movement? Has it not been pointed out time and again that he is a monster and not a radical? Anyone who has studied Russian history cannot fail to agree that in presenting Verhovensky as typical of radicalism Dostoevsky was oblivious to the innumerable examples of idealistic self-sacrifice which the class struggle in Russia had to show. There can be no doubt of Dostoevsky's spiteful tendentiousness in this respect. Professor Ernest J. Simmons is entirely in the right when he observes, in his book on Dostoevsky, that Verhovensky is no socialist because his ideology is "the criminal creed of the absolutely self-willed man." But where Professor Simmons is wrong, to my mind, is in contenting himself with this observation, as if that disposed of the matter once and for all.

For if it is true that in a factual sense Verhovensky is altogether untypical of the revolutionary movement of Dostoevsky's time, is it not also true, on the other hand, that this same Verhovensky has since become all too typical—typical, that is, of the men whom the Bolshevik revolution has raised to power and established as Russia's ruling elite. There is an uncanny likeness, after all, between "the criminal creed of the absolutely self-willed man" and the creed, prevailing in practice though for obvious reasons unacknowledged in theory, which is the

real motive-force of Russia's self-styled socialist masters. And because this likeness has become an historical fact it is no longer possible to dismiss Verhovensky as a monster and not a radical, as Professor Simmons dismisses him in his book. The revolutionary process as it has taken shape in the new order of Stalinism has indisputably confirmed Dostoevsky's insight that the monstrous in human nature is no more incommensurable with the social revolution than it is incommensurable with institutional Christianity. In point of fact, the totalitarian potential of both is incorporated in the principal symbol of the legend of the Grand Inquisitor—the symbol of the tower of Babel that replaces the temple of Christ.

Thus it can now be seen that as a character-image Verhovensky is symbolically representative of the revolution in its results, if not in its original motives. Of course, Dostoevsky was entirely tendentious when he ignored, in *The Possessed*, the role played in the socialist movement by such humanistic and libertarian personalities as Herzen, Chernichevsky, and Mikhailovsky; but here again, unfortunately, his bias is vindicated when it is brought home to us that the revolution, not as it is presented in the Marxist textbooks but as it actually developed, followed the path not of the socialist humanists but of socialist Machiavellians like Tkachev and Nechayev. To be sure, if examined in the light of the struggle for freedom in Czarist Russia, the right to dishonor of which Karmazinov speaks (and you may be sure that in this instance he speaks for his author) seems like a vile imputation. Yet the fact is that it is this right, in essence, that the triumphant revolutionaries arrogated to themselves—and precisely in the fashion of the Dostoevskyeen man-gods—when they proclaimed moral standards to be a bourgeois prejudice, proceeding on the assumption that to them all is permitted. It is the tragedy of the Russian people that history has proven Dostoevsky to be a truer prophet than Lenin. Only in speaking out of the depths of negation, however, was Dostoevsky a true prophet. Of his positive prophecies none have been fulfilled. The national-Christian ideology of which Shatov is the mouthpiece in *The Possessed* has turned out to be no more than wishful thinking. In the novel Verhovensky murders Shatov, and in real life this crime, endlessly multiplied, has become the foundation of the new Russian state. In this sense Leontiev was again shown to be right against

Dostoevsky when he declared that "Russia has only one religious mission, and that is to give birth to anti-Christ." Actually, the anguish of disintegration in Dostoevsky is the creative counterpart of this very idea, an idea strenuously denied in the consolatory and visionary parts of his writings.

But let us look further into Verhovensky's origins in the Russian revolutionary movement of the past century. The biographers of Dostoevsky tell us that the activity of Verhovensky's circle in the novel is an imaginative rendering of the Nechayev episode in the history of Russian radicalism. Now in Nechayevism the revolution suffered its first formidable inroads of Machiavellian deception and double-dealing. Nechayev invented the slogan: "Everything for the revolution—the end justifies the means." He systematically cultivated criminal methods (which are in no way identical with the methods of underground struggle) in the pursuit of his radical ends. Verhovensky's murder of Shatov is patterned on Nechayev's murder of the student Ivanov; and if we know that one section of the *Catechism of a Revolutionary*, composed by Bakunin and Nechayev, calls for "acquaintance with city gossips, prostitutes, and other private sources" for gathering and disseminating information and false rumors, we realize to what an extent, even to the repetition of comic details, the archetype of Nechayev is reproduced in the portrait of Verhovensky.* The *Catechism*, moreover, contains something more than formulas of conspiracy and provocation. In that document it is written that "everything which promotes the success of the revolution is moral, everything which hinders it is immoral"—a dictum, at once savage and naive, that Lenin took over in toto, applying it with all the rigor of his political nature and never

* In his political traits, that is. As a psychological type Verhovensky has Nechayev's ruthlessness and immorality but none of his revolutionary asceticism. As a matter of fact, in his psychological aspects Verhovensky reminds us more of such famous *agents provocateurs* as Azev and Malinovsky, both of whom, long after Dostoevsky's time, rose to high positions in the revolutionary movement while in the pay of the *Okhrana*, the Czar's secret police. Azev became head of the powerful terrorist section of the Social Revolutionary Party; Malinovsky, who had Lenin's confidence, became the chief spokesman of the Bolsheviks in the Duma. Of both Azev and Malinovsky it may be said that they were truly Dostoevskian in their double-mindedness of character, for they were not police-spies pure and simple but men of ambiguous motivation and dual loyalties who did not know from one day to the other what they really believed in or whether their principal allegiance was to the revolution or to their Czarist paymasters.

ceasing to defend it as the only possible ethic consistent with Marxist aims. Lenin's self-will was so inordinate that he always assumed perfect knowledge on his part as to what made for the ultimate success or failure of the revolution. Thus what appeared to him like an objective test of morality rested on nothing whatever except his subjective assumption of perfect knowledge, judgment, and disinterestedness. We can grant him the disinterestedness, but not the knowledge or the judgment. Because of the absolutism of his revolutionary character he failed to look beyond the abstractions of historical materialism to the real interests that lurk behind the ideologies of individuals as well as social groups. He overlooked the inescapable fact that behind every doctrine or program, including his own, there are living men, with immediate and concrete desires, needs, and ambitions, and that this could only mean that Nechayev's dictum would eventually be altered to read that everything is moral which promotes the success, not of the revolution, but of the men who choose to speak in its name, and that everything which hinders them is immoral. Lenin's disregard of the ethics of humanism was implicit in his self-will. The enormity and arrogance of that will is the peculiar sin of Bolshevism, the *hubris* for which Lenin has been paid out by the utter ruin of his revolutionary achievements.

The connection between Nechayevism and the revolution is close indeed. When Bakunin finally repudiated his fanatical disciple he exposed him as one who believed that "in order to create a workable and strong organization one must use as a basis the philosophy of Machiavelli and adopt the motto of the Jesuits: 'Violence for the body; lies for the soul.'" It was not until the Grand Inquisitor himself, the dictator Stalin, gained supreme power that Nechayev's central thought was translated into the terms of real life. Still, the totalitarian virus is no doubt present in Lenin's moral opportunism, an opportunism exalted into a principle of socialist organization and propaganda and thus far more pernicious in its consequences than the casual, unthinking pragmatism and the recourse to expediency that as a rule prevail in political affairs. The revolution is a means and not an end; and the outcome of Lenin's absolutizing of the revolution was that the means so completely usurped the end that it was soon transformed into its exact opposite—into a system reminiscent of Shigalov's thesis

rather than of the forecasts of Marx and Engels. What is Shigalov's thesis? That the only way to secure unlimited freedom is through unlimited despotism, or rather that the two concepts are ultimately identical. Therefore he proposes that nine-tenths of mankind be deprived of all freedom and individuality while one-tenth enjoys the unbounded power required for the compulsory organization of happiness. Shigalov's "earthly paradise" is nothing if not a remarkable prevision of Stalin's "workers' paradise." And when one comes to appreciate the fact that Dostoevsky's prognosis of the course of the revolution, however crude in detail, is essentially correct in its main outlines, one cannot but admire his astonishing clairvoyance; and that despite his malicious tendentiousness, which we can now put in the proper perspective without in any way justifying it.

This malice, inherent in Dostoevsky's character, was strengthened by his polemical exertions as a writer. Still, there is no denying that he decided against socialism on a principled metaphysical basis. His antipathy to it had nothing in common with the habitual objections of conservative property-holders, office-holders, and ideologues. He understood that "socialism is founded on the principles of science and reason . . . that it is not merely the labor question, it is before all else the atheistic question, the question of the form taken by atheism today"; and in a variant passage of *The Possessed* we find the statement, attributed to Liputin, that "socialism is a substitute for Christianity, it is a new Christianity, which wants to renew the whole world. It is positively the same as Christianity, but without God." Nevertheless he was drawn to it, for he was as much fascinated as repelled by the demonstrations of reason. Like Stavrogin, he never really attained the peace of religious faith, and when he believed he could not actually believe that he believed. He hated socialism because it objectified his lack of belief and both his fear and heretical love of the boundless expansion and change of which the human mind is capable. In his compulsion to test theory by practice he came close to the methods of extreme rationality; and when he subjected Christianity to this rigorous test he found that only a special kind of "idiot" and genius of neuroticism could possibly undertake to lead a Christian life.

His plebeianism was another element that tended to subvert his support of the autocracy and the church. On his subjective-psycho-

logical side he remained a democrat, regardless of the shifts that took place in his political convictions; and for this reason he could not restrain himself from berating the older generation of Slavophiles for their "aristocratic satiety." Like the critic Belinsky and the poet Nekrasov he belonged to the school of commoners, whose inner affinity was with the psychic distortions and the moral agitation and resentment of Gogol rather than with the objective art of Pushkin. In Dostoevsky's work we do not experience that sense of social hierarchies which affects us so strongly in the novels that Tolstoy wrote before his conversion. In modern times the plebeian world-feeling is one of the intrinsic conditions of heresy, and the spiritual equality which reigns in Dostoevsky's world seems like a kind of inverted socialism, a commune of the spirit.

In *The Possessed* liberal idealism receives the broadest and most perspicacious criticism in the history of political fiction. The comic strokes with which the portrait of the intellectual Stepan Trofimovitch, the elder Verhovensky, is executed, in no way diverts us from its enduring reality and social truth. This characterization has enormous contemporary meanings. It is only now, after fascism and communism have severely penalized Western culture for subjecting itself to the timorous and accommodating counsels of the liberals, that we can fully appreciate Stepan Trofimovitch.

A gentleman scholar and aesthete, he simultaneously abuses and adores the revolution. His standing protest he makes by lying down; he is subtle in his feelings, a self-indulgent humanitarian and a parasite. He is superior to Thomas Mann's Settembrini, whose distant relative he is, for he is understood not argumentatively but through a tangible social milieu. And what a hazardous yet just simplification it was to place him in the position of being the charge of a rich and aristocratic lady, of making an assertive dramatic image out of Varvara Petrovna's support of him. This exchange of cash and culture, however, is not conceived as a simple transaction; on the contrary, it entails mutual distrust, bitterness, and emotional tempests—at one and at the same time it involves very real sentiments, even love, and "a mutual exchange of sloppiness."

Stepan Trofimovitch is a typical modern figure, the liberal intellectual with a tender social conscience and a taste for fine feelings and ideas, who, while pluming himself on his advanced position as a champion of the oppressed, is at once thrown into a state of collapse when forced to face the consequences of his own commitments and the cruel exigencies of the historical process. This dilettante of revolution is bound to end up among its first victims. He is unable to cope with his revolutionary son, Pyotr, nor with the nihilists whom the latter trains in his base methods. In *Fathers and Sons*, Turgenev's Bazarov, the prototype of the nihilists in the Russian novel, holds the view that a good chemist is worth twenty poets. But Bazarov's nihilism is only a form of moral empiricism; he is an individualist as yet unaware of the potency of political action. A few decades later, in the 1870's, the nihilistic adversaries of Stepan Trofimovitch had already translated Bazarov's moral empiricism into the formulas of political terror and demagoguery. During the Fête—the description of which includes some of the novel's superb scenes—Stepan Trofimovitch defies the political mob by shouting at them: "What is more beautiful, Shakespeare or boots, Raphael or petroleum?" "*Agent provocateur!*" they growl in reply. It is a crushing reply and one that is all too indicative of the manner in which the revolutionaries in power will eventually dispose of the tender-minded intelligentsia. If in his generalizations Dostoevsky recognizes no difference between liberals, nihilists, and socialists, within the living organism of the novel he takes care to distinguish clearly between the elder and younger Verhovensky; paternity in this case is symbolic of a relation of ideas at once positive and negative. The revolutionary doctrine negates liberalism even as it grows out of it. In the historical sense what Pyotr represents is his father's ideas thought out to an outrageously logical conclusion, and for that very reason he becomes his father's worst enemy.

But the vitality of Stepan Trofimovitch's character is by no means confined to the political dimension. He is also a splendidly comical creation, richly illustrating Dostoevsky's gifts as a humorous writer that have been obscured by his accomplishments as psychologist and dialectician. In Stepan Trofimovitch, this "most innocent of fifty-year old infants" who is capable of the most surprising and subtle insights, Dostoevsky reached the apogee of his comic art—an art that produced

such figures as Foma Fomitch of *The Friend of the Family* and that entire incredible collection of buffoons, like Lebedev of *The Idiot* and Captain Lebyadkin of *The Possessed*, of whom at least one specimen is invariably to be found in any Dostoevskyeian cast of characters. Stepan Trofimovitch does not belong to this species. For all his poltroonery, tormenting vanity, nervous outbreaks, and fondness for French phrases, he is yet invested with a redeeming generosity and openness of feeling that converts him into a figure of heroico-comical proportions. We believe in him as we can never believe in his son Pyotr, in whom there is something cold and amorphous, and whom we can imagine only as a kind of abstract demon all the more terrible in his fury for being doomed to beat his wings in a void. He has no ability to transcend his situation, while his father has this ability above all; and that so endears him to us that in our sympathy we are persuaded that even if he is a bundle of human failings in him the human image is still the goad of love.

There are few scenes in Dostoevsky as marvelous as the scenes of Stepan Trofimovitch's stormy interviews with his capricious patroness, or of his appearance and declamations at the Fête, or of his engagement to Darya Shatova, and, in particular, of his flight and wanderings in the countryside, where he meets the Bible-selling woman, wooing her in his delirium and panic—the flight that ends with his breakdown and the self-confrontation of those last great reconciling speeches in which, as if summing up the rhetoric of a lifetime, he salutes “the Eternal and Infinite Idea” at the same time that he confesses to the lies he has told through all the years, summoning all to forgiveness, for all are guilty, all have wronged one another, in the hope that he too will be forgiven. In those last tremendous pages of the novel we are made to feel as though Stepan Trofimovitch, lying on his deathbed, has departed from his character in order to voice, in unison with his author, a great cry of grief for Holy Russia, a prayer that her sick men be freed of the demons that possess them so that, whole again and much afraid, they may come and sit at the feet of Jesus.

It is significant that the passage from the Gospels, which forms the epigraph to the novel, telling about the sick man cured of his devils and sitting at the feet of Jesus, is made to resound through Stepan Trofimovitch's last speeches, as if to indicate that the author,

despite the vindictive spirit of his initial approach to him, is so taken with his creature that he cannot help lending him a modicum of his own faith and outlook. It is a case of sympathy between the creative artist and the created being, in the sense of Keats' notion of "the poetical Character," which forfeits its own identity in taking unto itself the identities formed by the imagination. ("What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon poet," said Keats.) Now in Stepan Trofimovitch, modelled on a handsome Moscow professor by the name of Granovsky, a friend of Herzen and Belinsky, the "virtuous philosopher" in Dostoevsky wanted to score off the generation of the 1840's, whose rational humanism he regarded as a source of infection; but Stepan Trofimovitch turned out differently than is anticipated in the original design. Though his function in the novel is to stand as a reproach to the Westernizing intellectuals, he is creatively assimilated to such a degree that in surpassing himself he assumes other roles, not the least of which is to act as a foil to Dostoevsky in his farewell to the Schilleresque period of his own youth, the period of *Schwärmerei* and idealistic grandiloquence, when at one with his contemporaries he shared the exalted feelings inspired by the rational religion of humanity.

In Stavrogin and his alter egos, Kirillov and Shatov, Dostoevsky was reproducing the obsessions of his ultimate phase. As against radicals like Verhovensky and Karmazinov, they personify the "pure" Russians. Shatov, for instance, becomes the spokesman of the national destiny. What are the Russians like and what is their mission?—that is the problem tormenting him.

Three times, in *Fathers and Sons*, Turgenev essayed to define the "typical Russian," and each time he betrayed his sense of inferiority to the West and the complacent, moderate cast of his sensibility. (The three definitions occur in subordinate verbal constructions: *a*. "... a coarse, half-educated, but not ill-natured man, a typical Russian"; *b*. "the only good point in a Russian is his having the lowest possible opinion of himself"; *c*. "... a young man at once progressive and a despot, as often happens with Russians.") Dostoevsky was outraged by Turgenev's common sense and persistent depreciation of

Russia. Into his own conception of Russia and Russians he injected his characteristic emotion of extremity. The Russians are to him a kingdom of priests and a chosen people; even God is appropriated to its uses. In Shatov's scheme of things God is merely "the synthetic personality of the whole people, taken from its beginning to its end." These national visions anticipate much that Europe was to experience later; and the same holds true of Stavrogin's "life, so to speak, of mockery," of his psychic conundrums that are precursive of many tendencies in twentieth-century European literature.

It is significant that Shatov, who patently speaks for the author in his affirmation of the Russians as a god-bearing people destined to regenerate the world, is unable to attain in his faith the completeness that Kirillov attains in his atheism. For Shatov, though believing in Russian orthodoxy, in the body of Christ, and in the new advent that will take place in Russia, is nevertheless thrown for a loss when asked pointblank whether he actually believes in God. All he can say in reply is "I . . . I will believe in God." Thus he lays himself open to Stavrogin's gibe that he is preparing to cook an uncaught hare—"to cook your hare you must first catch it, to believe in God you must first have a god." Kirillov, on the other hand, is completely certain of his idea that God is dead, and in his obsession with this idea he challenges the universe, setting himself up as its master in the place of God.

Kirillov's atheism is of a desperate intensity without parallel in world literature. It is the atheism of a man so profoundly religious that once he is convinced of the impossibility of God's existence he must refuse at all costs to go on inventing Him; His absence is so agonizing a negation of meaning that he cannot help reacting to it by attempting to blow up the world, and since the world is not his to destroy he can only destroy himself. That seems to me to be the real motive of his suicide. To be sure, the commentators on Dostoevsky have mostly explained it as the consequence of Kirillov's logic of self-will, and it is indeed true that he makes of his suicide the climactic act of his self-willed accession to the role of the man-god. One must distinguish, however, between the logical and existential aspects of this act. Logically it is an assertion of the absolute freedom of his self-will; existentially it expresses the passionate indignation of his atheism, an atheism whose inescapable logic is beyond his endurance. His suicide is thus to be

conceived as an explosion of subjectivity protesting the objective godlessness of the world. *Allein zu sein und ohne Götter, das ist er, ist der Tod*, said Hölderlin. To be alone and without gods—that is death; and it is this thought, literally, that compels Kirillov to kill himself. In reading the overpowering description of his suicide and the dialogue that precedes it one becomes aware that here Dostoevsky is picturing nothing less than the self-crucifixion of an atheistic Christ. Consider that shortly before firing his shot Kirillov recalls the crucifixion of old in words of ecstatic pain:

"Listen to a great idea: there was a day on earth, and in the midst of the earth there stood three crosses. One on the Cross had such faith that he said to another, 'Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise.' The day ended; both died and passed away and found neither Paradise nor resurrection. His words did not come true. Listen: that man was the loftiest of all on earth. He was that which gave meaning to life. . . . For that is the miracle, that there never was and never will be another like Him. And if that is so, if the laws of nature did not spare even Him, have not spared even their miracle and made even Him live in a lie and die for a lie, then all the planet is a lie and rests on a lie and on mockery. So then, the very laws of the planet are a lie and the vaudeville of devils. What is there to live for? Answer, if you are a man."

Kirillov's suicide is a parody of the crucifixion of Christ—a parody because in a universe whose laws are "a lie and the vaudeville of devils" there can be no meaningful acts, only parodies.

The atheism of Kirillov is not to be equated with that of some of the modern existentialists. Sartre, for example, defines existentialism as "nothing less than an attempt to draw all the consequences of a coherent atheistic position"; and the chief consequence of the atheistic position is that it forces man to confront his freedom in a world emptied of all values and commands not derived from himself. This idea of man alone in his freedom is of course not alien to Kirillov, but in his dialectic it is so hugely exaggerated that it is transformed into a notion of human omnipotence and made into the basis of the man-god's mad rationale. On this side of it his atheism is a sick phantasy of his soul suffering the ordeal of God's absence. At bottom, however, his atheism is really a form of negative religiosity. It is real nevertheless, and in considering its implications there is no way of absolving the author of complicity in it. If Shatov speaks for him, so does Kirillov; and

if the latter manifests more spiritual vitality than the former it is no doubt because Dostoevsky imbued him with a deeper and more personal significance. V. V. Rozanov, a writer who brought exceptional gifts to the interpretation of Dostoevsky, was moved to say, in citing the passage from *The Possessed* quoted above, that "when Dostoevsky wrote those words you feel that through his soul, a single human soul, there passed such a terrifying atheism as has never been experienced before, or, if experienced, has not yet been uttered in words."

The curious thing about the ideas both of Shatov and Kirillov is that they are represented in the novel as emanations of Stavrogin's irony. To them his ideas have become altogether real, whereas he has forgotten them. Stavrogin experiments with life, only incidentally with ideas, and every experiment strengthens the demon of irony that possesses him. There are elements of Christian feeling in him, but only in the sense that at times he is inclined to believe in the devil, never in God. Everyone expects of him something unheard-of, something not expected from other people, for in truth he is a hero of charismatic authority, a leader-type who is bored, however, by his own charisma. That is what is really "new" in the character of Stavrogin, this refusal to make use of his own powers—a refusal caused by the recoil of his consciousness upon itself in the dreadful apprehension of its own limitless freedom. He is free of the sense of good and evil, being convinced that "good and evil do not exist . . . and are but a prejudice." Yet he knows that it is precisely in the attainment of this freedom that he will perish. He says of himself that he ought to commit suicide; but at the same time he rejects suicide for fear of showing greatness of soul, for such greatness could hardly be anything more than "another sham, the last deception in an endless series of deceptions." Dostoevsky, in creating the character-image of Stavrogin, reached the last frontier of the modern imagination, and it is perhaps for this reason, since life did not as yet contain him, that he could not make him "true to life" but was forced to rely almost entirely on his mastery of the devices of melodrama and mystification.

Nearly all the female characters in the novel are in love with Stavrogin, a love which he is incapable of reciprocating. Hence his desires are nothing less than crimes—the crime of murder above all. Thus it is through their love of him that both the imperious Liza and

the crippled, half-witted Marya are done in; and Matryosha, the little girl whom he has violated, kills herself. Stavrogin, like Svidrigailov in *Crime and Punishment*, is a sexual marauder, but in his case too it is the *idea* of sex rather than the reality of it that absorbs the imagination. This Dostoevskyeian idea of sex is not an abstraction; on the contrary, it is enormously creative in that it at once suggests and exceeds the reality behind it. But it is typical of Dostoevsky that he should have let nothing escape his ideological net, not even the cravings of the flesh and the aberrations of desire.

Of course, Dostoevsky paid for his ideological power by strictly limiting his incursions into the sensuous-material world. He gives us sensations of time, and only seldom of space. He has a prodigious appetite for people, but he is insensitive to textures and objects; his characters act sexually only when aroused by their own moral and spiritual sensuality. This overproduction of the spiritual makes for a constant inner crisis, for an analyzing attitude which shuts him off from nature. It is this quality which permits his narratives their breakneck pace—there is no need to stop when there is nothing to look at. The excessive sociability of his people has the same source. It has often been observed how perpetually dependent they are on externalization through talk and debate. Even in committing suicide they are not alone, and a love scene seldom takes place without the presence of a third person. Dostoevsky stages his climaxes only after he has assembled as many of his characters as possible into one room; and the action, in which the philosophical dialogue is inextricably involved with a story of mystery and crime, moves in a whirlwind manner toward a *denouement* that consumes heroes and victims alike in a conflagration of hatred, pity, resentment, remorse, and love.

If the religious-minded critics of Dostoevsky have emphasized almost exclusively the Christian element in his work, the Marxist critics have permitted political considerations to influence them in disparaging and ignoring his achievements. Gorky spoke of Dostoevsky as "our evil genius," strictly limiting himself to his negative features. Even D. S. Mirsky, who before going over to a Marxist position wrote with fine insight and precision about Dostoevsky, later com-

mitted himself to views contradicting his previous evaluations. Thus, in his preface to Edward Hallett Carr's biography of Dostoevsky, he expresses his gratification with Carr for showing up, as it were, his subject. Carr had laid great stress on the literary and Romantic antecedents of Dostoevsky, and Mirsky concludes that he is "modern only in so far as the term modern can be extended to Rousseau, Byron, and Benjamin Constant." He was produced by Russia precisely because she was backward and because "he was a belated parallel in his country to what the Romantics had been in the West." To Mirsky it seems that by labeling Dostoevsky the belated Romantic of a backward country he has effectively removed him from the terrain of the modern; what he has further in mind, of course, is to connect him with the reactionary tendencies of the Romantic movement in Germany and to a lesser extent in France.

In relating Dostoevsky to Romanticism in the way he does, Mirsky suggests the use of the Marxist "law of combined development." But to invoke this law is to disprove Mirsky's approach. The "law of combined development" explains why a bourgeois revolution, when it occurs in a backward country, tends to go beyond itself and to be transformed into a socialist one. A backward country is thus enabled to make up for lost time and outstrip its advanced neighbors, at least politically. There is no reason, however, to confine this phenomenon of accelerated mutation to politics. It also operates on the spiritual plane. To say, then, in this sense, that Dostoevsky was a belated Romantic does not at all mean that the Romantic world was his world or that he restored the Romantic state of mind.

Why is the Russian novel of the nineteenth century so great in its achievements? If the "law of combined development" has any application here, it would point to the need of the Russian novelist to break out ideologically and imaginatively from the blind alley in which his country found itself. This same need impelled him to augment his equipment by taking over as rapidly as he could whatever acquisitions of Western culture were open to him. Even when he rejected this culture, as Dostoevsky did, he was strongly affected by it. Before condemning it he still had to acquire some essential part of it.

To recognize the achievement of the Russian novel of the nineteenth century is to recognize Dostoevsky's supremacy as a modern

writer. His one rival is Tolstoy. Only dogmatists of progress, who conceive of it as an even and harmonious development, could presume to commit Dostoevsky to a museum of Romantic antiquities. It is true that he labored to give his genius a religious sanctification, but it must be kept in mind that in the sphere of imaginative creation progress does not simply consist of knowing what is true and what is false from the standpoint of progressive or scientific thought. Dostoevsky not only renovated the traditional properties of Romanticism, but also discovered inversions and dissociations in human feeling and consciousness which literature has to this day only imperfectly assimilated. Reactionary in its abstract content, in its aspect as a system of ideas, his art is radical in sensibility and subversive in performance.

Moreover, Romanticism is far from being as dreadful as Mirsky makes out. Its impulse is partly reactionary, of course, but in approaching the old values through the self-consciousness of the new epoch, it responded to new emotions and invented new themes. There are numberless examples of this dual function of Romanticism. Chateaubriand, for instance, was faithful to throne and altar; he set out to defend tradition and belabor Rousseau. "I am not like Rousseau," he wrote in the introduction to *Atala*, "an enthusiast over savages. . . . I do not think that pure nature is . . . beautiful. . . . I have always found it ugly. Let us paint nature, but selected nature (*la belle nature*). Art should not concern itself with the imitation of monsters." This declaration, however, as Saint-Beuve noted, was belied by the actual content of *Atala*, in which one encounters a crocodile on nearly every page.

Dostoevsky's "crocodiles" are thinking men.

THE DEATH OF IVAN ILYICH AND JOSEPH K.

Franz Kafka is best known for his innovations. His originality has so dazzled his readers that they tend to think of him almost solely in terms detached from any of the historic tendencies of modern literature. In recent years, however, we have learned to suspect excessive originality. The intensive study by modern critics of the relation between tradition and original talent has convinced most of us that originality at the point where it becomes the equivalent of eccentricity is more often a sign of weakness than of strength. In this sense, the isolation of Kafka not only delays a just estimate of his achievement but also exposes him to the danger that we shall merely gape at his phantastic performance and pass on.

The real question is whether Kafka's isolation is justified. Now while it is true that in certain respects Kafka is an idiosyncratic writer and that it would not do to underrate the extent to which he departed from the norms of the literary imagination, still it can be argued that the characteristic vision of his work is associated—at a level beyond surface "strangeness" or purely private inspiration—with other modern

creations not generally regarded as unique or abnormal. This may be demonstrated by comparing Kafka's novel *The Trial* with Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, a shorter narrative more widely known perhaps than any of Kafka's writings. The two narratives, though quite dissimilar in their formal subject-matter and literary methods, seem to me essentially similar in theme and conception. Above all they share a common ideological tendency, which is objective in the sense that it exists on a social and historical rather than personal plane. This tendency can be defined as a tendency against scientific rationalism, against civilization, against the heresies of the man of the city whose penalty is spiritual death.

It is two works I am comparing, of course, not two writers. In the hierarchy of modern literary art Tolstoy obviously ranks higher than Kafka. Indeed, considered as creative personalities the two men are poles apart. One was an aristocratic yet elemental genius, whose initial identification with the natural world was more profound than his subsequent recoil from it; the other was an invalid and a neurotic, a prey to all the fears that beset the small, lost people of the city, who was driven by an obsessive feeling of guilt to burrow into the very foundations of reality. All the more startling, then, to hear the Tolstoyan cry from above, from the heights, also issuing from below, from the Kafkan underground.

It is not, of course, as an existential study of death that *Ivan Ilyich* falls into the same framework as *The Trial*. The Tolstoyan concern with mortality is not shared by Kafka, who found life so nearly impossible that he could hardly muster the strength to look beyond it. In associating the two narratives the first thing that comes to mind, rather, is their common religious basis, for both echo with the Augustinian imprecation, "Woe unto thee, thou stream of human custom!" But the religious basis, though important, is much too general and variable to serve directly as a unifying principle. Patently Tolstoy's system of Christian anarchism excludes Kafka's dominant hypothesis of the incommensurability of the human and divine orders. It is above all within the range of depicted experience, of the applied attitudes toward the real and the unreal, that the correspondence between the two works reveals itself most clearly.

In the midst of their ordinary, and, to them, wholly satisfactory lives, Ivan Ilyich and Joseph K. are stricken down by mysterious catastrophes. Just as K., failing to win his case in the unknown and unknowable Court which tries him on an unspecified charge, is finally executed, so Ilyich, failing to recover from an "unheard of" illness, which no doctor is able to diagnose, finally dies in agony after screaming incessantly for three days and three nights. The "case" and the "illness" are variations of the same device, which permits the author to play God so as to confront an ordinary, self-satisfied mortal with an extraordinary situation, to put to rout his confidence in reason and in the habitual limits of his consciousness, and in the end to destroy him utterly.

Incapable of distinguishing themselves either for good or evil, neither Ilyich nor K. are sinners in the accepted sense. Nevertheless the inquisitorial art of their authors burns them at the stake as heretics. And their heresy consists simply of their typicality.

Standardized urban men, K. and Ilyich are typical products of a quantitative civilization. Neither rich nor poor and at all times removed from any material or spiritual extremity, they conform to the conventions with the regularity of a law of nature. Both are professional men: K. a bank official and Ilyich a state functionary, member of the "Judicial Council." They aspire to and ordinarily succeed in leading a life of light-hearted agreeableness and decorum. The history of Ilyich, says Tolstoy, "was the simplest, the most ordinary, and the most awful." He marries and children are born to him; but inevitably husband and wife get to despise each other, she becoming steadily more ill-tempered, and he striving to make the relationship void by hiding behind his social and official duties.

K., on the other hand, like Kafka, is a bachelor. Necessarily so, for that is a telling item in Kafka's indictment of him—an indictment which on the human plane is in fact no indictment at all—thus causing unwary readers to consider him innocent—but which on another plane contributes to his guilt. Kafka's letters and diaries show him to have been continually haunted by the image of family life. Because

of his personal deracination, he tended to idealize any human bond which rooted an individual in the community and supported him in his efforts to attain a status sanctified by the earthly as well as celestial powers. A projection of that side of his personality which Kafka wished to punish, K. concentrates within himself some of the faults of his author's condition and character, including the absence of family ties.

But from the chrysalis of the Kafkan self there also emerges another figure, who, by means of a psychic transformation, assumes the role of judge and avenger. This dread antagonist summarily lifts K. out of his rationalist sloth and plunges the metaphysical knife into his breast. However, this antagonist is not a character whom we can recognize, he is not a living actor in the drama of K.'s fate. He is, rather, a transcendental emanation taking shape in the actual plot of the novel, which is really a plot against K.'s life—and, in the last analysis, against the human faith in visible reality.

The catastrophe which overtakes K. is immaculately conceived, and thus much more mysterious in its nature than the one which Tolstoy inflicts upon Ilyich. Kafka clears in one bound the naturalist barrier to his symbolist art; and in so far as he describes everyday scenes and objects, he does so on his own terms, with the aim of producing effects of irony, contrast, and suspense. *The Trial* opens with the sentence: "Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning." This beguilement of the reader continues throughout the story, and though before long he begins doubting the "realism" of what he is told, he is not resentful of having been taken in by a false show, but, on the contrary, finds himself yielding entirely to this mockery of the real.

Kafka unites within one framework the realistic and symbolic, the recognizable and mysterious, in a way that severs the continuity of assumption between author and reader which has in a short time made the most difficult modern works universally accessible. To read him rightly one has, as it were, to learn to read anew; and to feel at home in his world it is first necessary to grasp his fundamental attitude toward life. At bottom the reason his meaning is so illegible is that he viewed

life as essentially illegible, incomprehensible; which does not mean, however, that he thought it meaningless. Having made his main premise the unknowability of the relations within which man lives, Kafka could permit himself a free range of hypotheses concerning their true character. His narratives are speculations translated into the language of the imagination; they are myths whose judicious, mock-scientific tonality at once dissociates them from the myth as an historical product. Experimental in tendency, they are not so much findings about reality as methods of exploring it. One might call them experimental myths. As meanings they move strictly in a circle, for they always return to their point of departure, namely, the uncertain, the unknown, the unfathomable. Hence their beginnings and ends are really identical: the origin and culmination of a Kafka story tend to fuse in our minds into a single mystery. Obviously the myth as *procedure*, the myth as a technique of investigation, is the myth inverted, the myth standing on its head; and in demonstrating its uses Kafka achieved a new mutation in the art of prose fiction.

But Kafka's myths are not experimental in the sense of an inner lack of commitment; nor are they experimental in the sense of a playful tentativeness of design. In one of his notebooks he gives us a clue to his intention. What he wished most, he writes, was to recreate life in such a way that "while still retaining its natural full-bodied rise and fall, it would simultaneously be recognized no less clearly as a nothing, a dream, a dim hovering. . . . Considered as a wish, somewhat as if one were to hammer together a table with a painful and methodical and technical efficiency, and simultaneously do nothing at all, and not in such a way that people would say: 'Hammering a table together is nothing to him,' but rather 'Hammering a table together is really hammering a table together to him, but at the same time it is nothing,' whereby certainly the hammering would become still bolder, still surer, still more real and, if you will, still more senseless."

Kafka realizes his wish. His forms dissolve the recognizable world even as they hold us to it by their matter-of-fact precision of detail. K. is persecuted by chimerical powers while he works at his desk in a bank, lives in an ordinary boarding-house on an ordinary street, and is subject to normal impressions and distractions. Kafka succeeds in joining the two planes, in "hammering" them together until

both are equally real and yet equally unreal. His intrinsic ambivalence found here its ideal expression. His myths, though experimental, unfold like dreams, and like dreams they banish the sense of "perhaps" and are predominantly made up of visual images. Their terror is like nothing so much as the sensation of drowning; it is the terror of sinking so deeply into workaday reality that, magically transformed, it turns into a dream, an illusion.

However, this illusion, this "nothing, dream, dim hovering," has a content. It is the cruel and unfathomable poetry of relations, the alchemy of fate. Phenomena are known, explicable—hence the naturalistic description of backgrounds—but relations are inexplicable and phantastic. These relations Kafka personifies with bold literalness in the form of a summary Court in perpetual session, a divine hierarchy, an irrational aggregate of rules and regulations known as the Law. Utterly alienated from nature, he sees everything in terms of society, which he conceives as the totality of being within which dwell both the known and unknown, the earthly and heavenly, the divine Law and the human litigant. Kafka's fear and its objects are in the main social; his divinities are phantastic personifications of irrational relationships chiefly rendered in the fear-and-dependence imagery of the Father.

In his stories the immemorial symbolism of the divine is inverted. Brightness, purity, immateriality—what reason is there to believe that these are really the attributes of Heaven? Instead Kafka houses his Court in a slum and fills the dilapidated rooms with bad air. Even the Castle, which is seen through a medieval haze, is in reality a squat office-building where the functionaries—the angels and demons—are preoccupied with writing letters and filing documents. It is both easy and difficult to handle these functionaries; there are no fixed principles for dealing with them. Beyond their zeal in behalf of the Law, they share all the vices of humanity; and like the sons of God mentioned in the Book of Genesis, they pursue the daughters of man.

The officials of the Law never go hunting for crime among the populace: they are simply drawn toward the guilty. No errors are possible, and if such errors do occur, who is finally to say that they are errors? And man is not tried by means of his high ambitions, by

the foiling of his heroic designs, but on the level of a realistic humanism, by the failure of his effort to define his status in the community and win a measure of control over his social and personal destiny. What is particularly original here, as well as baffling of course, is the combination of the archaic and modern. Reviving the furies of antiquity, the fatality lurking at the roots of existence, Kafka at the same time contrives to enclose them within the prosaic framework of litigations, petty documented worries, and bureaucratic tedium.

The metaphysical end sought by Kafka is accomplished by Tolstoy in a different way, for his realistic method is sober and "heavier." Whereas Kafka plays, as it were, both ends against the middle, Tolstoy always proceeds from the external to the internal. In his apartment, one day, Ilyich goes up a ladder to have some hangings draped, misses a step and slips; "but, like a strong and nimble person, he clung on, and only knocked his side against the corner of a frame. The bruised place ached, but it soon passed off." In time, however, he begins complaining of an uncomfortable feeling on the "left side" of his stomach, and soon we see him hovering over the edge of an abyss. While his world is falling apart, his physicians are engaged in balancing the probabilities "between a loose kidney, chronic catarrh, and appendicitis." They never manage to come to a decision; nor are they able to mitigate the patient's suffering, let alone save him from his fate. And as the story goes on, the disease which lays Ilyich low gradually loses its verisimilitude, until finally it takes on the form of an occult visitation. Manifestly in order to get the better of the accepted normality of the world, the naturalism of Tolstoy's narrative must come to an end at the precise point where the symbolism of Kafka's begins: at a crisis not only of conscience but of objective reality. The devised catastrophe must reach a dimension where normal explanations cease to operate. Only within that dimension can it function properly. At the close of his life Ilyich realizes that the horrible thing that goes on within him—the irresistible "It"—is at once a disease and yet not a disease. Is it not, after all, the voice of his soul, just as K.'s Court is perhaps nothing more than a machine of persecution invented by his alter ego to penalize K.'s death in life? (In one of his parables Kafka envisions a prisoner who, seeing a gallows being erected in the courtyard of his prison, "mistakenly" believes it is meant for him, and that

night he slips out of his cell and hangs himself.) But this simple explanation holds only on the level of ordinary religious psychology, in the light of which the ordeals of Ilyich and K. merely illustrate once again the eternal struggle between man's brute nature and his soul. The real problem, however, is to discover the particular meanings, social and historical, of Ilyich's contrite soul and K.'s machine of persecution.

In the loneliness of his pain Ilyich understands at last that his life had been trivial and disgusting. In this accounting which he gives to himself he thinks of what he now desires. To live and not to suffer, yes, but how? And his reply: "Why, live as I used to live before, happily and pleasantly," shows that as yet no real change has occurred in him. But during the last three days and nights he feels himself being thrust by an invisible force into a black sack; and his agony is due to his being in the black sack of course, and—"still more to not being able to get right into it." What hinders him from fully getting into the black sack? The pretense that his life had been good.—"That justification of his life held him fast and would not let him go forward, and it caused him more agony than all." Only on freeing himself of this pretense, of this illusion, does the terror of death leave him and he expires.

Morally, the death of K. duplicates the death of Ilyich. He, too, at first mistakes his apocalyptic fate, not perceiving the shape of a hidden god outlined in the petty event of his arrest. He expects to return to his normal state of well-being as soon as the matter of the absurd and obscure charge against him is cleared up. But after a few scuffles with the agents of the Court, he realizes the gravity of his situation and engages lawyers to defend him. These lawyers might as well be Ilyich's doctors. Both Ilyich and K. feel that their ostensible protectors are wasting time in irrelevant and supposedly scientific generalities, while they—patient and defendant—want to know only one thing: Is their condition serious?

Much like Ilyich, K. is impelled to give an accounting of his life, his case requiring, he decides, that he put it in the form of a written plea for justice containing a complete review of his career down "to the smallest actions and accidents formulated and examined from every

angle." And just as Ilyich can no longer keep his mind on his legal documents, but must ask everybody questions concerning sick people, recoveries and deaths, so K. is continually distracted from his duties at the bank by his need to hunt out other defendants and compare experiences with them. Tolstoy's description of Ilyich's mounting incapacity to cope with his daily routine in view of that "matter of importance" which he must constantly keep before him, forms an almost exact parallel to those scenes in *The Trial* when K. stands looking out of his office window, so overwhelmed by his "case" that he can no longer face his business callers. And toward the end—on the evening of his execution—as two men in frock coats and top hats who look like old-time tenors arrive to take him away, K. likewise contents himself with half-truths. Though he allows his warders to lead him off, still he is not entirely resigned but must make a last-minute attempt to shake them loose. He is half in and half out of the black sack. But finally he understands that there is nothing "heroic" in resistance: "I have always wanted to snatch at the world with twenty hands, and not for a very laudable motive either. That was wrong, and am I to show now that not even a whole year's struggle with my case has taught me anything? Am I to leave this world as a man who shies away from all conclusions?" And thinking of that High Court to which he had in vain striven to penetrate, he suffers the knife to be turned in him twice.

2

The use to which Kafka puts the categories of law in *The Trial* is to some extent analogous to Tolstoy's use of medicine in *Ivan Ilyich*. Representative disciplines, institutions, conspicuous structures erected by man's progress and science, law and medicine are fortresses against which those who spurn the authority of progress and science must take up arms. But the assault takes different forms. Whereas Tolstoy makes a frontal attack, openly jeering at the doctors for their silly airs and pose of omniscience, and even accusing them of lying, Kafka enters the fortress disguised as a friend. Emotionally ambivalent, he

sympathizes at once with the divine judge and with the human defendant; hence even as he demonstrates the meaninglessness of the notion of justice he wears the mask of legality. His unusual irony converts juridical relations, which we are accustomed to think of as supremely rational, into the very medium of irrationality. K. discovers that the enactments and ordinances of the Court are not motivated by a love of order but by caprice and every kind of disorderly impulse. Bent on proving the disjunction between justice and necessity, human intention and destiny, Kafka created in his myth of the Law a wonderfully imaginative, albeit emotionally cruel, equivalent of a philosophical idea.

Against this Law, which abhors reason, it is impossible to revolt; nor are reforms to be thought of. Combined action of the defendants (the socialist recommendation) is out of the question, for "each case is judged on its own merits, the Court is very conscientious about that. . . ." The arbitrariness of the system of justice impels the accused men to suggest improvements, and that is one of the sources of their pathos. The only sensible thing to do is to adapt oneself to existing conditions. "This great organization remains . . . in a state of delicate equilibrium, and if someone took it upon himself to alter the disposition of things around him, he ran the risk of losing his footing and falling to destruction while the organization would simply right itself by some compensating reaction in another part of its machinery. . . ."

Manifestly in this scheme of things the outlook for social progress is entirely blank, and Kafka's acceptance of its perils is unconditional. True, it is an irrational world, but its irrationality, he suggests, is perhaps no more than the specific illusion, the particular distortion, inherent in the human perspective. "In the fight between you and the world back the world!" he wrote. Such "backing" must be understood as a derangement of the attitudes native to western literary art. This art has always pitted itself against the world, the heroes it created struck out and often conquered it, at the very least they protested against its injustices and insufficiencies. Kafka, on the other hand, refuses to cheat the world of its triumph, and the peculiarly austere tone of his prose evolves out of the tension between his sympathy for his heroes and the doom to which he consigns them.

This doom, articulated in narrative terms through the device of the mysterious catastrophe, requires that before the final blow is struck the victim be subjected to a process of dehumanization. If to be human is to be what K. and Ilyich are, then to dehumanize is to spiritualize them—such is the logic of this process. Kafka ensnares K. in the web of an inhuman law; Tolstoy, ever steadfast in his naturalism, crushes his victim physically. The latter method is simpler and entirely orthodox as religious procedure. Invoking as it does the old dualism of body and spirit, it suggests modern ideas as well, such as the idea of kinship between disease and spirit stressed by Nietzsche and in his wake by Thomas Mann. "Disease," writes Mann in his essay *Goethe and Tolstoy*, "has two faces and a double relation to man and his human dignity. On the one hand it is hostile; by overstressing the physical, by throwing man back upon his own body, it has a dehumanizing effect. On the other hand, it is possible to feel about illness as a highly dignified human phenomenon." And while it may be going too far, he adds, to claim that disease and spirit are identical, still the two conceptions have much in common. "For the spirit is pride; it is a wilful denial and contradiction of nature; it is detachment, withdrawal, estrangement from her." Mann's observations are supported by Tolstoy's practice in *Ivan Ilyich*. The story, which has the qualities of a rite of purification, was published in 1886, several years after the author's "conversion"; and the disease which ravages Ilyich evidently represents Tolstoy's reaction against the natural world with which he formerly identified himself and his advance toward a rational religiosity and an ethical conception of social existence.

But *The Trial* is a purer, a more ideal instance of a magical rite. In the psychology of its author it is not difficult to recognize the symptoms of a compulsion-neurosis. The conscience-phobia, the morbid scruples and self-depreciation, the ceremonial "correctness" of behavior conceived as a supple bargaining, as a counterbalance to the threatening maneuvers of fate, the compensatory altruism and humility—all are obvious symptoms. Freud remarks that the primary obsessive actions of compulsion neurotics are "really altogether of a magical nature"; and in another context he notes that insofar as the neuroses are caricatures of social and cultural creations, the compulsion-neurosis is like a caricature of a religion. More: aside from sexual features the Freudian

theory detects in this and similar neuroses a regression in time to the world-pictures of primitive men. The collective representations of the primitive are reproduced by the neurotic on a subjective and antisocial basis. Perhaps Kafka's conception of destiny may be understood in part as an example of this type of neurotic regression. His depiction of the Court, despite the modernity of its bureaucratic procedures, recalls us to remote and primordial ideas of fate. This is even truer of his novel *The Castle*, where the sense of fate is expressed in spatial rather than in temporal terms. By this I mean that the Castle, which is the abode of divinity, as well as the village, which is the community of men—the crowd of celestial functionaries as well as the crowd of peasants—are all subordinate to an even more primary power which has no personification and no rationale but which is simply the necessary and eternal disposition of things. This conception of fate is older than religion and antedates the birth of the gods. It originated in the magical and animistic stage of tribal life. The Greek word *Moirai*—fate—as F. M. Cornford has shown in his book *From Religion to Philosophy*, once possessed spatial significance. It refers back to a cosmogony which was developed prior to the Homeric theogony. *Moirai* was an impersonal potency dominating both gods and humans whose real meaning was portion, allotment, province, domain. To sin meant to encroach, to cross a sacred frontier, to expose oneself to Nemesis—the avenger of trespass. This “separation of the world into elemental provinces” can be traced back, according to Cornford, to the sanctification of “status,” namely, to the projection into myth of the social and economic organization of the tribe.

In this sense it can be said that what is represented in *The Castle* is *Moirai* rather than fate working itself out according to modern conceptions of it. Unable to establish himself in the “village”, which is the province of man, the pathos of K. in this novel is the pathos of an alien whose pursuit of status ends in failure. Status is synonymous with the state of grace; and he who has a home has status. This home, this cosmic security, this sacred order of status, is not a mythical or psychological but an historical reality. It persisted as a way of life, despite innumerable modifications, until the bourgeois era, when the organization of human life on the basis of status was replaced by its organization on the basis of free contract. The new, revolutionary

mode of production sundered the unity of the spiritual and temporal, converting all things into commodities and all traditional social bonds into voluntarily contracted relations. In this process man was despiritualized and society atomized; and it is against the background of this vast transformation of the social order that the meaning of the death of Ilyich and K. becomes historically intelligible.

What should be clearly understood about Ilyich and K. is that they typify the average man of modern society. Tolstoy was much more conscious of this than Kafka, who in picturing society as a fabulous totality confounded this world with the kingdom of heaven. But Tolstoy was socially motivated; his "conversion" was prompted by the dissolution of the century-old feudal ties, the breakdown of the ancient patriarchal relations, and the protest of the bewildered peasantry and nobility against the transformation of Russia into a capitalist country. His preoccupation with religion mirrored a utopian social program which has been defined as "feudal socialism"; and the historically reversed socialism of an aristocracy which bankers and tradesmen threaten to evict or have evicted from power cannot but assume idealist and religious forms.

Ilyich is the man of the city—the anonymous commodity-materialist who sweeps away the simple and transparent social relations of the past. His energy, the depersonalized energy of the modern man, subverts the idyllic world of sanctified status. In this connection it is characteristic that the only positive figure in Tolstoy's story should be the peasant Gerasim, a domestic in Ilyich's household, whose health and heartiness, in contrast to that of the city people, not only does not offend but soothes the sick man. And as to the mysterious catastrophe which destroys Ilyich, what is it in historical reality if not the ghost of the old idealism of status returning to avenge itself on its murderer? Through Ilyich's death the expropriators are expropriated.

But Kafka's religious preoccupations, you will say, is devoid of social meaning, since it seems purely psychological and even neurotic in origin. Yes, but let us not confuse origin with content. While it is true that Kafka's religious feelings were fed by a neurosis, there is however a sense, I believe, in which one might speak of the modern neurotic as the victim of the destructive triumph of "psychology" over

nature, of the city over the country. He might be described as a casualty of a collective neurosis, of an illness of society.

What is K. if not, again, the blank man of the city, the standard *Teilmensch* cut off from all natural ties? He lives in the agitated, ever-changing world of modern relationships, a world in which the living man, destitute of individuality, has forgotten the ancient poetry of status, the hallowed certitudes that once linked law and destiny, justice and necessity, rights and duties. It is this dry world and himself in it that Kafka represents in the person of K. Against him, who embodies the present, Kafka directs his irony by entangling him with the banished past, with the ancient poetry. This happens when K. is suddenly arrested by the agents of an unknown Court, and when he finds himself under the jurisdiction of an inaccessible Castle. The Court and the Castle are sinister symbols of the old idealism; and K.'s entanglement with it effects a phantastic reversal of past and present, or dream and reality. It is now the dream of the past which is installed as master, and reality—the present—is banished. Naturally, everything is now turned upside down for K. He, the perverted modern man, can never adapt himself to the conditions of the absolute; he commits the most ludicrous errors and, though guilty, he thinks himself innocent. As he enters the Court he feels stifled in its pure air; its magnificent chambers he mistakes for dingy tenement rooms. Blinded by the fierce light of *Moirai*, he can never experience the unity of justice and necessity but must ever divide the one from the other. K. dies of his contact with the past. His fate bears witness to a conflict of past and present, a conflict out of which the past emerges victorious. But the victory is wholly metaphysical.

This analysis by no means implies that Kafka was in any way conscious of the hidden historic reference of his symbols. On the contrary, no one among modern writers seems more deficient in a sense of history. The conflict between past and present is rendered in his work as a conflict between the human and divine orders. K. is allowed to live out his illusions; in fact, on the human level he is justified, for on that level the Court inevitably appears to be no more than an arbitrary and amoral power. Nevertheless, since the divine disposition of things cannot ultimately be questioned, man is destined to be ever in

the wrong. Yet this abstract and mystical idea cannot be taken at face value. The time-spirit enters art without waiting for the permission of the artist. Kafka was writing under an obscure and irresistible compulsion, and his attitude toward his work, which he seldom felt the need to publish, was contradictory: on the one hand he thought of it as a form of transcendental communion with his fellow-men, and on the other as an effort strictly personal in function. It would be short-sighted, however, to limit its application to its subjective origin and purpose.

So far as Kafka's religiosity is concerned, it is clear that he was not religious in any traditional sense. His imagination excluded dogmas, systems of theology, and the concept of time-hallowed institutions as a bulwark. He was not looking to religion to do the work of politics: to effect a new synthesis or restore an old one, to make culture coherent or to impose order upon society. His religious feeling was of a pristine nature, essentially magical and animistic; and he attempted to re-materialize the soul thousands of years after religious thought had dematerialized it.

Unlike novelists like Dostoevsky and even Tolstoy in some of his moods, who are seldom at a loss for directions to the divine, Kafka makes the unknowability of God his chief postulate and the lack of communication between man and the powers that rule him its first corollary. Whereas Dostoevsky does not at all hesitate to describe a saint, Kafka cannot even imagine saintliness, for that would imply familiarity with the divine—precisely what, in his view, is unattainable. He asked, What is God like? as if the conception of the deity is utterly without a history. And the phantasy of his interrogations on this theme is deepened by his turning the empirical method inside out in applying it to the investigation of a non-empirical hypothesis, to the rationalization of the irrational.

Moreover, to postulate a God without a history has its consequences: it means that one is also lifting the world out of history. And, indeed, in Kafka history is abolished; there is only one time, the present; his people are not characters but simply bundles of human behavior, as immutable as a dream, rendered instantaneously, their inner and outer selves confounded. Character, individuation, are after

all a proof of some measure of adjustment to the environment; the Kafkan man, however, is deprived of the most elementary requisites of adjustment: he moves within the dimension of fate, never within the dimension of personality, and the necessary link between the two is sprung.

Yet in spite of the profoundly unhistorical character of Kafka's art there are certain qualities in K., the chief protagonist of his narratives, that cannot be perceived except on the plane of historical interpretation. Thus historically his death, as that of Ilyich, signifies the disappearance of the hero from the drama of fate; their death falls outside the framework of the traditional tragic scheme. Tragedy implies that the hero, though vanquished by fate, commemorates in his very defeat the greatness and importance of man. The hero is always sharply individualized; his is an ample character. The opposite is true of K. and Ilyich, however. They are characterless in the sense indicated by Dostoevsky when he wrote in *Notes from Underground* that "the man of the nineteenth century must be, is morally obliged to be, a characterless individual," and by Marx when he remarked that the advantages of progress are paid for by the loss of character.

K. and Ilyich are heroes neither on the classic nor on the romantic level. Romanticism made of the self the primary criterion of values and its hero relived the past in terms of the new, critical, self-conscious bourgeois individuality. But in time the abstract modes of modern life undermined the self-confidence of the romantic hero and, stripped of his hopes and ambitions, he sank into anonymity. It is this historic depletion of man which is brought to light in the fate of K. and Ilyich alike.

But whereas the pathos of Tolstoy is that of an heroic struggle for a better life and for a constructive, even if utopian, rationality in the perception of man's enterprises and fate, the pathos of Kafka is that of loneliness and exclusion. In him the tradition of western individualism regards itself with self-revulsion; its joyous, ruthless hero is now a victim; he who once proudly disposed of many possessions is now destitute, he has neither woman nor child; in his conflict with society he

has suffered an utter rout, and his fate no longer issues from his own high acts but from the abstract, enigmatical relations that bend him to their impersonal will.

Despite his longing for positive values, Kafka never resolved his perplexity. Considered in purely subjective terms, his myth of the Law is clearly the idealized impasse of his experience. If in the past of humanity the *unknown*—God, Destiny, the law—served in the hands of kings and prophets as a collective and collectivizing formula, as an instrument of ordering and controlling life, in Kafka it manifests itself in an exhausted condition, no longer a means of mythically unifying reality but of decomposing it. The pious emotion is here being re-absorbed into its primordial origins. Again the gods are taboo, that is, both holy and unclean. Moreover, even they are unable to retrace their steps and go back to their ancient home in nature. Once the lively and fertile emanations of primitive fear, of tribal need and desire, they now exist only as dead letters in a statute-book.

Believing as he does in the spirituality of life, in the “indestructible,” Kafka nevertheless replies to his own query about the coming of the Messiah by declaring that he will appear only “when he is no longer needed, he will arrive the day after his arrival, he will not come on the last of the days, but on the day after the last.” So out of his reach is human fulfilment that it has become unreal. Even his hope for salvation is ambiguous. He fears it as the final betrayal, the ironic confirmation of his despair.

NOTES ON THE DECLINE OF NATURALISM

Quite a few protests have been aired in recent years against the sway of the naturalist method in fiction. It is charged that this method treats material in a manner so flat and external as to inhibit the search for value and meaning, and that in any case, whatever its past record, it is now exhausted. Dissimilar as they are, both the work of Franz Kafka and the works of the surrealist school are frequently cited as examples of release from the routines of naturalist realism, from its endless book-keeping of existence. Supporting this indictment are mostly those writers of the younger group who are devoted to experimentation and who look to symbolism, the fable, and the myth.

The younger writers are stirred by the ambition to create a new type of imaginative prose into which the recognizably real enters as one component rather than as the total substance. They want to break the novel of its objective habits; some want to introduce into it philosophical ideas; others are not so much drawn to expressing ideas as to expressing the motley strivings of the inner self — dreams, visions, and fantasies. Manifestly the failure of the political movement in the literature of the past decade has resulted in a revival of religio-esthetic attitudes. The

young men of letters are once again watching their own image in the mirror and listening to inner promptings. There is a program calling for the adoption of techniques of planned derangement as a means of cracking open the certified structure of reality and turning loose its latent energies. And surely one cannot dispose of such a program merely by uncovering the element of mystification in it. For the truth is that the artist of the avant-garde has never hesitated to lay hold of the instruments of mystification when it suited his purpose, especially in an age such as ours, when the life about him belies more and more the rational ideals of the cultural tradition.

It has been remarked that in the long run the issue between naturalism and its opponents resolves itself into a philosophical dispute concerning the nature of reality. Obviously those who reject naturalism in philosophy will also object to its namesake in literature. But it seems to me that when faced with a problem such as that of naturalist fiction, the critic will do well not to mix in ontological manoeuvres. From the standpoint of critical method it is impermissible to replace a concrete literary analysis with arguments derived from some general theory of the real. For it is plainly a case of the critic not being able to afford metaphysical commitments if he is to apply himself without preconceived ideas to the works of art that constitute his material. The art-object is from first to last the one certain datum at his disposal; and in succumbing to metaphysical leanings—either of the spiritualist or materialist variety—he runs the risk of freezing his insights in some kind of ideational schema the relevance of which to the task in hand is hardly more than speculative. The act of critical evaluation is best performed in a state of *ideal aloofness* from abstract systems. Its practitioner is not concerned with making up his mind about the ultimate character of reality but with observing and measuring its actual proportions and combinations within a given form. The presence of the real affects him directly, with an immediate force contingent upon the degree of interest, concreteness, and intensity in the impression of life conveyed by the literary artist. The philosopher can take such impressions or leave them, but luckily the critic has no such choice.

Imaginative writing cannot include fixed and systematic definitions of reality without violating its own existential character. Yet in any imaginative effort that which we mean by the real remains the basic

criterion of viability, the crucial test of relevance, even if its specific features can hardly be determined in advance but must be *felt anew* in each given instance. And so far as the medium of fiction is concerned, one cannot but agree with Henry James that it gains its "air of reality"—which he considers to be its "supreme virtue"—through "its immense and exquisite correspondence with life." Note that James's formulation allows both for analogical and realistic techniques of representation. He speaks not of copies or reports or transcripts of life but of relations of equivalence, of a "correspondence" which he identifies with the "illusion of life." The ability to produce this illusion he regards as the storyteller's inalienable gift, "the merit on which all other merits . . . helplessly and submissively depend." This insight is of an elementary nature and scarcely peculiar to James alone, but it seems that its truth has been lost on some of our recent catch-as-catch-can innovators in the writing of fiction.

It is intrinsically from this point of view that one can criticise the imitations of Kafka that have been turning up of late as being one-sided and even inept. Perhaps Kafka is too idiosyncratic a genius to serve as a model for others, but still it is easy to see where his imitators go wrong. It is necessary to say to them: To know how to take apart the recognizable world is not enough, is in fact merely a way of letting oneself go and of striving for originality at all costs. But originality of this sort is nothing more than a professional mannerism of the avant-garde. The genuine innovator is always trying to make us actually experience his creative contradictions. He therefore employs means that are subtler and more complex: *at the very same time that he takes the world apart he puts it together again*. For to proceed otherwise is to dissipate rather than alter our sense of reality, to weaken and compromise rather than change in any significant fashion our feeling of relatedness to the world. After all, what impressed us most in Kafka is precisely this power of his to achieve a simultaneity of contrary effects, to fit the known into the unknown, the actual into the mythic and vice versa, to combine within one framework a conscientiously empirical account of the visibly real with a dream-like and magical dissolution of it. In this paradox lies the pathos of his approach to human existence.

A modern poetess has written that the power of the visible derives from the invisible; but the reverse of this formula is also true. Thus the

visible and the invisible might be said to stand to each other in an ironic relation of inner dependence and of mutual skepticism mixed with solicitude. It is a superb form of doubletalk; and if we are accustomed to its exclusion from naturalistic writing, it is all the more disappointing to find that the newly-evolved 'fantastic' style of the experimentalists likewise excludes it. But there is another consideration, of a more formal nature. It seems to me a profound error to conceive of reality as merely a species of material that the fiction-writer can either use or dispense with as he sees fit. It is a species of material, of course, and something else besides: it also functions as the *discipline of fiction*, much in the same sense that syllabic structure functions as the discipline of verse. This seeming identity of the formal and substantial means of narrative-prose is due, I think, to the altogether free and open character of the medium, which prevents it from developing such distinctly technical controls as poetry has acquired. Hence even the dream, when told in a story, must partake of some of the qualities of the real.

Whereas the surrealist represents man as immured in dreams, the naturalist represents him in a continuous waking state of prosaic daily living, in effect as never dreaming. But both the surrealist and the naturalist go to extremes in simplifying the human condition. J. M. Synge once said that the artist displays at once the difficulty and the triumph of his art when picturing the dreamer leaning out to reality or the man of real life lifted out of it. "In all the poets," he wrote, and this test is by no means limited to poetry alone, "the greatest have both these elements, that is they are supremely engrossed with life, and yet with the wildness of their fancy they are always passing out of what is simple and plain."

The old egocentric formula, "Man's fate is his character" has been altered by the novelists of the naturalist school to read, "Man's fate is his environment." (Zola, the organizer and champion of the school, drew his ideas from physiology and medicine, but in later years his disciples cast the natural sciences aside in favor of the social sciences.) To the naturalist, human behavior is a function of its social environment; the individual is the live register of its qualities; he exists in it as animals

exist in nature.* Due to this emphasis the naturalist mode has evolved historically in two main directions. On the one hand it has tended towards passive documentation (milieu-panoramas, local-color stories, reportorial studies of a given region or industry, etc.), and on the other towards the exposure of socio-economic conditions (muckraking). American fiction of the past decade teems with examples of both tendencies, usually in combination. The work of James T. Farrell, for instance, is mostly a genre-record, the material of which is in its very nature operative in producing social feeling, while such novels as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Native Son* are exposure-literature, as is the greater part of the fiction of social protest. Dos Passos' trilogy, *U. S. A.*, is thoroughly political in intention but has the tone and gloss of the methodical genre-painter in the page by page texture of its prose.

I know of no hard and fast rules that can be used to distinguish the naturalist method from the methods of realism generally. It is certainly incorrect to say that the difference is marked by the relative density of detail. Henry James observes in his essay *The Art of Fiction* that it is above all "solidity of specification" that makes for the illusion of life—the air of reality—in a novel; and the truth of this dictum is borne out by the practice of the foremost modern innovators in this medium, such as Proust, Joyce, and Kafka. It is not, then, primarily the means employed to establish verisimilitude that fix the naturalist imprint upon a work of fiction. A more conclusive test, to my mind, is its treatment of the relation of character to background. I would classify as naturalistic that type of realism in which the individual is portrayed not merely as

* Balzac, to whom naturalism is enormously indebted, explains in his preface to the *Comédie Humaine* that the idea of that work came to him in consequence of a "comparison between the human and animal kingdoms." "Does not society," he asks, "make of man, in accordance with the environment in which he lives and moves, as many different kinds of man as there are different zoological species? . . . There have, therefore, existed and always will exist social species, just as there are zoological species."

Zola argues along the same lines: "All things hang together: it is necessary to start from the determination of inanimate bodies in order to arrive at the determination of living beings; and since savants like Claude Bernard demonstrate now that fixed laws govern the human body, we can easily proclaim . . . the hour in which the laws of thought and passion will be formulated in their turn. A like determination will govern the stones of the roadway and the brain of man. . . . We have experimental chemistry and medicine and physiology, and later on an experimental novel. It is an inevitable evolution." (*The Experimental Novel*)

subordinate to his background but as wholly determined by it—that type of realism, in other words, in which the environment displaces its inhabitants in the role of the hero. Theodore Dreiser, for example, comes as close as any American writer to plotting the careers of his characters strictly within a determinative process. The financier Frank Cowperwood masters his world and emerges as its hero, while the “little man” Clyde Griffiths is the victim whom it grinds to pieces; yet hero and victim alike are essentially implements of environmental force, the carriers of its contradictions upon whom it stamps success or failure—not entirely at will, to be sure, for people are marked biologically from birth—but with sufficient autonomy to shape their fate.

In such a closed world there is patently no room for the singular, the unique, for anything in fact which cannot be represented plausibly as the product of a particular social and historical complex. Of necessity the naturalist must deal with experience almost exclusively in terms of the broadly typical. He analyses characters in such a way as to reduce them to standard types. His method of construction is that of accretion and enumeration rather than of analysis or storytelling; and this is so because the quantitative development of themes, the massing of detail and specification, serves his purpose best. He builds his structures out of literal fact and precisely documented circumstance, thus severely limiting the variety of creative means at the disposal of the artist.

This quasi-scientific approach not only permits but, in theory at least, actually prescribes a neutral attitude in the sphere of values. In practice, however, most naturalists are not sufficiently detached or logical to stay put in such an ultra-objective position. Their detractors are wrong in denying them a moral content; the most that can be said is that theirs is strictly functional morality, bare of any elements of gratuity or transcendence and devoid of the sense of personal freedom.* Clearly such a perspective allows for very little self-awareness on the part of characters. It also removes the possibility of a tragic resolution of experience. The world of naturalist fiction is much too big, too inert, too hardened by social habit and material necessity, to allow for that tenacious self-assertion of the human by means of which tragedy justifies and ennobles its protagonists. The only grandeur naturalism knows is the grandeur of

* Chekhov remarks in one of his stories that “the sense of personal freedom is the chief constituent of creative genius.”

its own methodological achievement in making available a vast inventory of minutely described phenomena, in assembling an enormous quantity of data and arranging them in a rough figuration of reality. *Les Rougon-Macquart* stands to this day as the most imposing monument to this achievement.

But in the main it is the pure naturalist—that monstrous offspring of the logic of a method—that I have been describing here. Actually no such literary animal exists. Life always triumphs over methods, over formulas and theories. There is scarcely a single novelist of any importance wearing the badge of naturalism who is all of a piece, who fails to compensate in some way for what we miss in his fundamental conception. Let us call the roll of the leading names among the French and American naturalists and see wherein each is saved.

The Goncourts, it is true, come off rather badly, but even so, to quote a French critic, they manage “to escape from the crude painting of the naked truth by their impressionistic mobility” and, one might add, by their mobile intelligence. Zola’s case does not rest solely on our judgment of his naturalist dogmas. There are entire volumes by him—the best, I think, is *Germinal*—and parts of volumes besides, in which his naturalism, fed by an epic imagination, takes on a mythic cast. Thomas Mann associates him with Wagner in a common drive toward an epic mythicism:

They belong together. The kinship of spirit, method, and aims is most striking. This lies not only in the ambition to achieve size, the propensity to the grandiose and the lavish; nor is it the Homeric leitmotiv alone that is common to them; it is first and foremost a special kind of naturalism, which develops into the mythical. . . . In Zola’s epic . . . the characters themselves are raised up to a plane above that of every day. And is that Astarte of the Second Empire, called Nana, not symbol and myth?” (*The Sufferings and Greatness of Richard Wagner*).

Zola’s prose, though not controlled by an artistic conscience, overcomes our resistance through sheer positiveness and expressive energy—qualities engendered by his novelistic ardor and avidity for recreating life in all its multiple forms.* As for Huysmans, even in his naturalist period he

* Moreover, it should be evident that Zola’s many faults are not rectified but merely inverted in much of the writing—so languidly allusive and decorative—of the literary generations that turned their backs on him.

was more concerned with style than with subject-matter. Maupassant is a naturalist mainly by alliance, i.e. by virtue of his official membership in the School of Médan; actually he follows a line of his own, which takes off from naturalism never to return to it. There are few militant naturalists among latter-day French writers. Jules Romains is sometimes spoken of as one, but the truth is that he is an epigone of all literary doctrines, including his own. Dreiser is still unsurpassed so far as American naturalism goes, though just at present he may well be the least readable. He has traits that make for survival—a Balzacian grip on the machinery of money and power; a prosiness so primary in texture that if taken in bulk it affects us as a kind of poetry of the commonplace and ill-favored; and an emphatic eroticism which is the real climate of existence in his fictions—Eros hovering over the shambles. Sinclair Lewis was never a novelist in the proper sense that Zola and Dreiser are novelists, and, given his gift for exhaustive reporting, naturalism did him more good than harm by providing him with a ready literary technique. In Farrell's chronicles there is an underlying moral code which, despite his explicit rejection of the Church, seems to me indisputably orthodox and Catholic; and his Studs Lonigan—a product of those unsightly urban neighborhoods where youth prowls and fights to live up to the folk-ideal of the "regular guy"—is no mere character but an archetype, an eponymous hero of the street-myths that prevail in our big cities. The naturalism of Dos Passos is most completely manifested in *U. S. A.*, tagged by the critics as a "collective" novel recording the "decline of our business civilization." But what distinguishes Dos Passos from other novelists of the same political animus is a sense of justice so pure as to be almost instinctive, as well as a deeply elegiac feeling for the intimate features of American life and for its precipitant moments. Also, *U. S. A.* is one of the very few naturalist novels in which there is a controlled use of language, in which a major effect is produced by the interplay between story and style. It is necessary to add, however, that the faults of Dos Passos' work have been obscured by its vivid contemporaneity and vital political appeal. In the future, I think, it will be seen more clearly than now that it dramatizes social symptoms rather than lives and that it fails to preserve the integrity of personal experience. As for Faulkner, Hemingway, and Caldwell, I do not quite see on what grounds some critics and literary historians include them in the naturalist school. I should

think that Faulkner is exempted by his prodigious inventiveness and fantastic humor. Hemingway is a realist on one level, in his attempts to catch the "real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion"; but he is also subjective, given to self-portraiture and to playing games with his ego; there is very little study of background in his work, a minimum of documentation. In his best novels Caldwell is a writer of rural abandon—and comedy. His *Tobacco Road* is a sociological area only in patches; most of it is exotic landscape.

It is not hard to demonstrate the weakness of the naturalist method by abstracting it, first, from the uses to which individual authors put it and, second, from its function in the history of modern literature. The traditionalist critics judge it much too one-sidedly in professing to see in its rise nothing but spiritual loss—an invasion of the arcanum of art by arid scientific ideas. The point is that this scientific bias of naturalism was historically productive of contradictory results. Its effect was certainly depressive insofar as it brought mechanistic notions and procedures into writing. But it should be kept in mind that it also enlivened and, in fact, revolutionized writing by liquidating the last assets of "romance" in fiction and by purging it once and for all of the idealism of the "beautiful lie"—of the long-standing inhibitions against dealing with the underside of life, with those inescapable day-by-day actualities traditionally regarded as too "sordid" and "ugly" for inclusion within an aesthetic framework. If it were not for the service thus rendered in vastly increasing the store of literary material, it is doubtful whether such works as *Ulysses* and even *Remembrance of Things Past* could have been written. This is not clearly understood in the English speaking countries, where naturalism, never quite forming itself into a "movement," was at most only an extreme emphasis in the general onset of realistic fiction and drama. One must study, rather, the Continental writers of the last quarter of the 19th Century in order to grasp its historical role. In discussing the German naturalist school of the 1880's, the historian Hans Naumann has this to say, for instance:

Generally it can be said that to its early exponents the doctrine of naturalism held quite as many diverse and confusing meanings as the doctrine of expressionism seemed to hold in the period just past. Imaginative writers who at bottom were pure idealists united with the dry-as-dust advocates of a philistine natural-scientific program on the one hand and with the shameless exploiters of erotic themes on the other. All met

under the banner of naturalism—friends today and enemies tomorrow. . . . But there was an element of historical necessity in all this. The fact is that the time had come for an assault, executed with glowing enthusiasm, against the epigones . . . that it was finally possible to fling aside with disdain and anger the pretty falsehoods of life and art (*Die Deutsche Dichtung der Gegenwart*, Stuttgart, 1930, p. 144).

And he adds that the naturalism of certain writers consisted simply in their "speaking honestly of things that had heretofore been suppressed."

But to establish the historical credit of naturalism is not to refute the charges that have been brought against it in recent years. For whatever its past accomplishments, it cannot be denied that its present condition is one of utter debility. What was once a means of treating material truthfully has been turned, through a long process of depreciation, into a mere convention of truthfulness, devoid of any significant or even clearly definable literary purpose or design. The spirit of discovery has withdrawn from naturalism; it has now become the common denominator of realism, available in like measure to the producers of literature and to the producers of kitsch. One might sum up the objections to it simply by saying that it is no longer possible to use this method *without taking reality for granted*. This means that it has lost the power to cope with the ever-growing element of the problematical in modern life, which is precisely the element that is magnetizing the imagination of the true artists of our epoch. Such artists are no longer content merely to question particular habits or situations or even institutions; it is reality itself which they bring into question. Reality to them is like that "open wound" of which Kierkegaard speaks in his *Journals*: "A healthy open wound; sometimes it is healthier to keep a wound open; sometimes it is worse when it closes."

There are also certain long-range factors that make for the decline of naturalism. One such factor is the growth of psychological science and, particularly, of psychoanalysis. Through the influence of psychology literature recovers its inwardness, devising such forms as the interior monologue, which combines the naturalistic in its minute description of the mental process with the anti-naturalistic in its disclosure of the subjective and the irrational. Still another factor is the tendency of naturalism, as Thomas Mann observes in his remarks on Zola, to turn into the

mythic through sheer immersion in the typical. This dialectical negation of the typical is apparent in a work like *Ulysses*, where "the myth of the *Odyssey*," to quote from Harry Levin's study of Joyce, "is superimposed upon the map of Dublin" because only a myth could "lend shape or meaning to a slice of life so broad and banal." And from a social-historical point of view this much can be said, that naturalism cannot hope to survive the world of 19th century science and industry of which it is the product. For what is the crisis of reality in contemporary art if not at bottom the crisis of the dissolution of this familiar world? Naturalism, which exhausted itself in taking an inventory of this world while it was still relatively stable, cannot possibly do justice to the phenomena of its disruption.

One must protest, however, against the easy assumption of some avant-gardist writers that to finish with naturalism is the same as finishing with the principle of realism generally. It is one thing to dissect the real, to penetrate beneath its faceless surface and transpose it into terms of symbol and image; but the attempt to be done with it altogether is sheer regression or escape. Of the principle of realism it can be said that it is the most valuable acquisition of the modern mind. It has taught literature how to take in, how to grasp and encompass, the ordinary facts of human existence; and I mean this in the simplest sense conceivable. Least of all can the novelist dispense with it, as his medium knows of no other principle of coherence. In Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* there is a famous passage in which the novelist Edouard enumerates the faults of the naturalist school. "The great defect of that school is that it always cuts a slice of life in the same direction: in time, lengthwise. Why not in breadth? Or in depth? As for me, I should like not to cut at all. Please understand: I should like to put everything into my novel." "But I thought," his interlocutor remarks, "that you want to abandon reality." Yes, replies Edouard, "my novelist wants to abandon it; but I shall continually bring him back to it. In fact that will be the subject; the struggle between the facts presented by reality and the ideal reality."

SKETCHES IN CRITICISM

I. MRS. WOOLF AND MRS. BROWN

In her wonderfully high-spirited essay "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," written in 1924, Virginia Woolf came out for scrapping the conventional realism of the Edwardian generation, the generation of Wells, Galsworthy, and Bennett. The new course for English fiction, she declared, is being set by novelists like Joyce and Forster and Lawrence and herself, who were discarding the old outworn methods. Confident that they could be relied on to make good the promise of the age, she boldly predicted that it would prove to be "one of the great ages of English literature." But in conclusion she warned that it could be reached only "if we are determined never, never to desert Mrs. Brown."

Mrs. Brown, the old lady in the railway carriage, served Mrs. Woolf as the symbol of reality—of reality as we think we know it and of the human character as we live it daily and hourly. It was Mrs. Woolf's idea, in other words, that no adequate substitute for Mrs. Brown can be found but that it is possible to devise new ways of coping with the rather stodgy yet ever so obstinate old lady. Now, however, in evaluating the actual literary practice that followed and by some years even preceded the theoretical flights of her manifesto against the Edwardians,

the questions that need to be asked are these: What really happened between Mrs. Woolf and Mrs. Brown? Did Mrs. Woolf succeed in holding on to Mrs. Brown or was she finally forced to desert her? And if she deserted her, as I think she did, what were the consequences of this act? Did it reduce or increase her powers as a novelist who was also one of the leading innovators in modern writing? Our judgment not only of Mrs. Woolf's fiction but of contemporary fiction in general is affected by whatever answers can be given to such questions.

E. M. Foster is among the critics who have applauded Mrs. Woolf's creative efforts; and he appears to snub Mrs. Brown when speaking of *The Waves*, surely the most abstract of Mrs. Woolf's novels, as her best work. But in another passage of the same essay he implicitly modifies his estimate of her achievement. There are two kinds of life in fiction, he observes, "life on the page and life eternal," and it is only the first kind of life that Mrs. Woolf was able to master. "Her characters never seem unreal, however slight or fantastic their lineaments, and they can be trusted to behave appropriately. Life eternal she could seldom give; she could seldom so portray a character that it was remembered afterwards on its own account." Mrs. Woolf no doubt made a very brave attempt to break through conventional realism and to create new forms for the novel. *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* are minor successes and unique in their way, but on the whole she failed. Some years ago William Troy outlined the full extent of this failure in a brilliant essay, in which he demonstrated that Mrs. Woolf's style is the product of a "facile traditionalism," that the unity of her novels is "merely superficial or decorative, corresponding to no fundamental organization of the experience," and that her characters are "unable to function anywhere but on the plane of the sensibility."*

Mr. Troy's definitive analysis may be supplemented by several observations. There is the fact, for example, that at one time Mrs. Woolf thought of herself as an associate of Joyce, whereas actually there is little kinship between them. Consider to what totally different uses they put such a device as the interior monologue. While in Joyce the interior monologue is a means of bringing us closer to the characters, of telling us *more* about them than we could learn from a purely objective

* Cf. "Virginia Woolf: The Novel of Sensibility," reprinted in the critical anthology, *Literary Opinion in America*.

account of their behavior, in Mrs. Woolf it becomes a means of telling us *less* about them, of disengaging their ego from concrete situations in life and converting it into a vehicle of poetic memory. Her tendency is to drain the interior monologue of its modern content and turn it back to the habitual forms of lyrical expression—and reverie. Where Joyce performs a radically new act of aesthetic selection, Mrs. Woolf performs what is in the main an act of exclusion; for she retains no more fictional material than will suffice to identify the scene and its human inhabitants; beyond that all is sensation and impression of a volatile kind. And it is so volatile because only on the surface does it flow from the actual experience of the characters—its real source is the general tradition of English poetry and of the poetic sensibility. However, there is a crucial fault in Mrs. Woolf's grasp even of this tradition, for she comprehends it one-sidedly, and perhaps in much too feminine a fashion, not as a complete order but first and foremost as an *order of sentiments*.

In *Between the Acts*, Mrs. Woolf's last and most unhappy book, the following complaint is sounded time and again: "None speaks with a single voice. None with a voice free from the old vibrations. Always I hear corrupt murmurs; the chink of gold and metal. Mad music. . . ." One feels that this is the author's requiem for a lost art, that here she is pronouncing judgment against herself. But it is by no means the final judgment. Something remains that is deeply moving, an expiatory tenderness, the soul's searching of its own roots. To read her closely is to catch the strains of that "mad music" that sometimes possessed her, a music which breaks through the "old vibrations," the used-up words and disembodied imagery of such "poetic" abstractions as Time and Change, Life and Death. It is the deranged song of Septimus Smith, who is Mrs. Dalloway's double and who dies that she may live. Septimus is the mysterious stranger, the marked man, the poet upon whom an outrage had been committed; he is at once the sacrificial goat and a veritable "lord of creation." This apparition haunted Mrs. Woolf, but always she strove to escape from it. She felt more at home with Mrs. Dalloway.

The ultimate failure of Virginia Woolf's experiments might perhaps be explained by going back to her initial conception of reality as an old lady in a railway carriage called Mrs. Brown. For what is Mrs. Brown if not the product of the traditional realism of the English novel? What

is she if not the dominant figure of that world so scorned by Mrs. Woolf—the world of Messrs. Wells, Galsworthy, and Bennett? The truth is that she tacitly accepted, even as she revolted against her elders, their innermost vision of reality. Hence all she could do is turn their vices inside out—since they had materialized the novel she was to devote herself to spiritualizing it. Forgotten was the pledge “never, never to desert Mrs. Brown.” But Mrs. Woolf was profoundly mistaken in her belief that she had seen through Mrs. Brown and was now free to dismiss her. If literature can be said to have a permanent theme, that theme is precisely *The Mystery of Mrs. Brown*, who is a creature of many paradoxes and truly unfathomable. She is not to be encompassed either by the materialist or by the idealist approach and she lets the novelists make what they can of her. To some she appears as a commonplace old lady; to others as a tiger in the night.

Mrs. Woolf's idea of Mrs. Brown is expressive of all the assumptions she was born to, of the safety and domestication of that upper-class British culture to which she was so perfectly adjusted. Now the breach between poetry and prose, conceived as opposed to each other in the same absolute way (but is it absolute?) that pleasure is opposed to pain, is one of the most secure assumptions of that culture; and Mrs. Woolf carried its traditional dualism to its furthest extreme. Therefore she was forced to invent a definition of what is real, of what life is, quite as artificial as the one she repudiated. “Life,” she declaimed in her essay “Modern Fiction,” “is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.” That is the essence of idealism, of that other, that sacrosanct reality in which Mrs. Woolf luxuriates but from which Mrs. Brown is excluded.

Yet if Mrs. Woolf was not a great literary artist, she was surely a great woman of letters. “She liked writing,” as Mr. Forster says, “with an intensity that few writers have attained, or even desired.” *The Death of the Moth*, her last collection of essays and reviews, while not quite so impressive as the two volumes of *The Common Reader*, contains at least a half dozen pieces that are first-rate. Never a systematic critic, she was a master of such neglected forms as the literary portrait and the familiar essay. And it is her enthusiasm and the purity and passion of her devotion to writing, rather than the poetic code which she endeavored

to impose on the fictional medium, that will in the end secure a place for her, even though of the secondary order, in the history of English letters.

II. HENRY MILLER

If Henry Miller's status in our literary community is still so very debatable, it is probably because he is the type of writer who cannot help exposing himself to extreme appraisals with every page that he adds to his collected works. He is easily overrated and with equal ease run down or ignored altogether. Consider his present situation. With few exceptions the highbrow critics, bred almost to a man in Eliot's school of strict impersonal aesthetics, are bent on snubbing him. What with his spellbinder's tone, bawdy rites, plebeian rudeness and disdain of formal standards, he makes bad copy for them and they know it. His admirers, on the other hand, are so hot-lipped in praise as to arouse the suspicion of a cultist attachment. They evade the necessity of drawing distinctions between the art of exploiting one's personality and the art of exploiting material, from whatever source, for creative purposes. And in Miller's case such distinctions are very much in order. His work is so flagrantly personal in content that in moments of acute irritation one is tempted to dismiss it as so much personality-mongering. Repeatedly he has declared that his concern is not with writing as generally understood but with telling the "more and more inexhaustible" story of his life—a story stretched to include a full recital of his opinions, philosophic rhapsodies, intuitions, hunches, and buffooneries. All too often he plunges into that maudlin boasting of the ego to which the bohemian character is generically disposed. Yet at his best he writes on a level of true expressiveness, generating a kind of all-out poetry, at once genial and savage.

Unfortunately, since finishing off his expatriation and returning to his native country he has given more and more free rein to his worst tendency, that of playing the philosopher on a binge and the gadabout of the California avant-garde. The last book of his in which his great talent is shown to best advantage is *The Colossus of Maroussi*, published in 1942. It is a travel-book on Greece of a very special type. Though containing some plain information about the country and its inhabitants, it intrinsically belongs to the modern tradition of the fugitives from progress—from the lands ravaged by the machine, the salesman, and the abstract thinker—the tradition of Melville and Gauguin in Tahiti and D. H. Lawrence in Mexico and Taos. Miller went to Greece to purge himself of his long contact with the French and to make good his hope for spiritual renewal. "In Greece," he writes, "I finally achieved coordination. I became deflated, restored to proper human proportions, ready to accept my lot and to give of all that I have received. Standing in Agamemnon's tomb I went through a veritable rebirth." He speaks of the Greeks as "aimless, anarchic, thoroughly and discordantly human," thus identifying them closely with his own values; and though confessing that he never read a line of Homer, he none the less believes them to be essentially unchanged.

Where he shows an unusual aptitude for descriptive prose is in the account of his visits to Mycenae, Knossus, Phaestos, and other sites of antiquity. Some of the passages are very good examples of his rhetorical prowess. Hyperbolic statement is his natural mode of communication, yet he has a vital sense of reference to concrete objects and symbols which permits him to gain a measure of control over his swelling language. He is particularly addicted to using terms and images drawn from science, especially biology and astronomy; and his unvarying practice is to distribute these borrowings stylistically in a manner so insinuating as to produce effects of incongruity and alarm. It is a device perfectly expressive of his fear of science and all its works. For Miller belongs to the progress-hating and machine-smashing fraternity of contemporary letters, though lacking as he does the motive of allegiance to tradition, it is open to question whether his co-thinkers would ever assent to his company. Of late, too, he has increasingly yielded to his mystical leanings, and his mysticism is of the wholesale kind, without limit or scruple. Thus there is a curious chapter in *The Colossus of Maroussi*

describing his interview with an Armenian soothsayer in Athens, who confirms Miller in his belief that he is never going to die and that he is destined to undertake missions of a messianic nature that will "bring great joy to the world." Now this is the sort of thing that can be taken, of course, either as a fancy piece of megalomania or as a legitimate aspiration to which every human being is entitled; and this writer is not prepared to commit himself one way or the other.

But if Miller's recent work has been disappointing, the one way to recover a sense of his significance is to go back to his three early novels—*Tropic of Cancer*, *Black Spring*, and *Tropic of Capricorn*. These novels are autobiographical, and he appears in them in the familiar role of the artist-hero who dominates modern fiction. Where he differs from this ubiquitous type is in the extremity of his destitution and estrangement from society. Reduced to the status of a lumpen-proletarian whom the desolation of the big city has finally drained of all illusions and ideals, he is now an utterly declassed and alienated man who lives his life in the open streets of Paris and New York.

In these novels the narrator's every contact with cultural objects serves merely to exacerbate his anarchic impulses. There no longer exists for him any shelter from the external world. Even the idea of home—a place that the individual can truly call his own because it is furnished not only with his belongings but with his very humanity—has been obliterated. What remains is the fantasy of returning to the womb, a fantasy so obsessive as to give rise to an elaborate intrauterine imagery as well as to any number of puns, jokes, imprecations, and appeals.

It is precisely in his descriptions of his lumpen-proletarian life in the streets that Miller is at his best, that his prose is most resonant and alive—the streets in which a never ending array of decomposed and erratic phenomena gives his wanderings in search of a woman or a meal the metaphysical sheen of dream and legend. In every shop-window he sees the "sea-nymph squirming in the maniac's arms," and everywhere he smells the odor of love "gushing like sewergas" out of the leading mains: "Love without gender and without lysol, incubational love, such as the wolverines practise above the treeline." In these novels food and

sex are thematically treated with such matter-of-fact exactitude, with such a forceful and vindictive awareness of rock-bottom needs, that they cease to mean what they mean to most of us. Miller invokes food and sex as heroic sentiments and even generalizes them into principles. For the man who is down and out has eyes only for that which he misses most frequently; his condition makes of him a natural anarchist, rendering irrelevant all conventions, moral codes, or any attempt to order the process of experience according to some value-pattern. The problem is simply to keep alive, and to that end all means are permissible. One turns into a desperado, lurking in ambush in hallways, bars, and hotel-rooms in the hope that some stroke of luck will enable one "to make a woman or make a touch." He literally takes candy from babies and steals money from prostitutes. As for obtaining regular work, he was always able "to amuse, to nourish, to instruct, but never to be accepted in a genuine way . . . everything conspired to set me off as an *outlaw*."

The fact that the world is in a state of collapse fills him with deep gratification ("I am dazzled by the glorious collapse of the world") because the all-around ruin seems to justify and validate what has happened to him personally. His particular adjustment he accomplishes by accepting the collapse as a kind of apocalyptic show from which the artist who has been rejected by society, and whose role is to revive the primeval, chaotic instincts, might even expect to gain the resurgence of those dreams and myths that the Philistines have done their utmost to suppress. It is senseless to interfere, to try to avert the catastrophe; all one can do is to recoil into one's private fate. "The world is what it is and I am what I am," he declares. "I expose myself to the destructive elements that surround me. I let everything wreak its own havoc with me. I bend over to spy on the secret processes, to obey rather than to command." And again: "I'm neither for nor against, I'm neutral. . . . If to live is the paramount thing, then I will live even if I become a cannibal." And even in his own proper sphere the artist is no longer free to construct objective forms. He must abandon the "literary gold standard" and devote himself to creating biographical works—human documents rather than "literature"—depicting man in the grip of delirium.

And Miller's practice fits his theory. His novels do in fact dissolve the forms and genres of writing in a stream of exhortation, narrative,

world-historical criticism, prose-poetry and spontaneous philosophy, all equally subjected to the strain and grind of self-expression at all costs. So riled is his ego by external reality, so confused and helpless, that he can no longer afford the continual sacrifice of personality that the act of creation requires, he can no longer bear to express himself implicitly by means of the work of art as a whole but must simultaneously permeate and absorb each of its separate parts and details. If everything else has failed me, this author seems to say, at least this book is mine, here everything is fashioned in my own image, here I am God.

This is the meaning, I think, of the "biographical" aesthetic that Miller at once practised and preached in his early work and which an increasing number of writers, though not cognizant of it as a program, nevertheless practise in the same compulsive manner, not necessarily for reasons as personal as Miller's or with the same results, but because the growing alienation of man in modern society throws them back into narcissistic attitudes, forces them to undertake the shattering task of possessing the world that is now full of abstractions and mystifications through the instrumentality of the self and the self alone. Not "Know Thyself!" but "Be Yourself!" is their motto. Thomas Wolfe was such a writer, and his career was frustrated by the fact that he lacked sufficient consciousness to understand his dilemma. Miller, on the other hand, was well aware of his position when writing his early fictions. Instead of attempting to recover the lost relation to the world, he accepted his alienated status as his inexorable fate, and by so doing he was able to come to some kind of terms with it.

If freedom is the recognition of necessity, then what Miller gained was the freedom to go the whole length in the subversion of values, to expose more fully perhaps than any other contemporary novelist in English the nihilism of the self which has been cut off from all social ties and released not only from any allegiance to the past but also from all commitments to the future. The peculiarly American affirmation voiced by Whitman was thus completely negated in Miller. Total negation instead of total affirmation! No wonder that like Wolfe and Hart Crane and other lost souls he was continually haunted by Whitman as by an apparition. In *Tropic of Cancer* he speaks of him as "the one lone figure which America has produced in the course of her brief life . . . the first and last poet . . . who is almost undecipherable today,

a monument covered with rude hieroglyphs for which there is no key." And it is precisely because he had the temerity to go the whole length that Miller is important as a literary character, though his importance, as George Orwell has observed, may be more symptomatic than substantial, in the sense that the extreme of passivity, amorality, and acceptance of evil that his novels represent tends to demonstrate "the impossibility of any major literature until the world has shaken itself into a new shape."

In all his books Miller apostrophizes the Dadaists, the Surrealists and the seekers and prophets of the "marvelous," wherever they may be found. Perhaps because he discovered the avant-gardists so late in life, he is naïve enough to take their system of verbal ferocity as its face value and to adopt their self-inflationary mannerisms and outcries. At the same time he likes to associate himself with D. H. Lawrence, who was not at all an avant-gardist in the Parisian group sense of the term. He apparently regards himself as Lawrence's successor. But the truth is that they have very little in common, and there is no better way of showing it than by comparing their approaches to the sexual theme.

Miller is above all morally passive in his novels, whereas Lawrence, though he too was overwhelmed by the alienation of modern man, was sustained throughout by his supreme gift for moral activity; and he was sufficiently high-visioned to believe that a change of heart was possible, that he could reverse the current that had so long been running in one direction. Hence his idea of sexual fulfillment as a means of reintegration. Miller, however, in whose narratives sex forms the main subject-matter, presents sexual relations almost without exception in terms of fornication, which are precisely the terms that Lawrence simply loathed. The innumerable seductions, so casual and joyless, that Miller describes with such insistence on reproducing all the ribald and obscene details, are almost entirely on the level of street encounters. He has none of Molly Bloom's earthiness, nor does he ever quake with Lawrence's holy tremors. He treats erotic functions with a kind of scabrous humor, for there is scarcely any feeling in him for the sex-partner as a human being. What he wants is once and for all to expose "the conjugal orgy in the Black Hole of Calcutta." Not that he is open to the charge of pornography; on the contrary, behind his concentration on sexual experience

there is a definite literary motive, or rather a double motive: first, the use of this experience to convey a sense of cultural and social disorder, to communicate a nihilist outlook, and second, an insatiable naturalistic curiosity. It is plain that Miller and Lawrence are opposites rather than twins.

Miller's claims as a guide to life and letters or as a prophet of doom can be easily discounted, though one remembers an essay by him on Proust and Joyce, called "The Universe of Death," which is a truly inspired piece of criticism. In his three novels, however, he is remarkable as the biographer of the hobo-intellectual and as the poet of those people at the bottom of society in whom some unforeseen or surreptitious contact with art and literature has aroused a latent antagonism to ordinary living, a resolve to escape the treadmill even at the cost of hunger and degradation. In dealing with this material, Miller has performed a new act of selection. There is in his fiction, also, a Dickensian strain of caricature which comes to the surface again and again, as in the riotously funny monologues of the journalists Carl and Van Norden in *Tropic of Cancer*. The truth is that his bark is worse than his bite. He strikes the attitudes of a wild man, but what he lacks is the murderous logic and purity of his European prototypes. Though he can be as ferocious as Céline, he is never so consistent; and the final impression we have of his novels is that of a naturally genial and garrulous American who has been through hell. But now that he has had a measure of recognition and has settled down at home to receive the homage of his admirers he seems to have entered a new phase, and his work only occasionally reminds us of the role of bohemian desperado which in his expatriate years he assumed with complete authority and conviction.

III. DR. WILLIAMS IN HIS SHORT STORIES

In his prose as in his poetry William Carlos Williams is too hardy a frontiersman of the word to permit himself the idle luxuries of aestheticism. There are too many things to be seen and touched, too many cadences of living speech to be listened to and recorded. Kenneth Burke once said of Williams that he was engaged in "discovering the shortest route between subject and object." Perhaps that explains why in *Life on the Passaic River*, a collection of nineteen short stories, not one imitates in any way the conventional patterns of the genre. The directness of this writer's approach to his material excludes its subjection to the researches of plot and calculated form. What Williams tells us is much too close to him to lend itself to the alienation of design; none of his perceptions can be communicated through the agency of invented equivalents. The phenomena he observes and their meanings are so intimately involved with one another, the cohabitation of language and object is so harmonious, that formal means of expression would not only be superfluous but might actually nullify the incentive to creation.

These notations in a doctor's notebook, these fragments salvaged from grime and squalor, these insights gained during the routines of humble labor—such would only be given the lie by the professional mannerisms of authorship, its pomposities and braggadocio. Where usually a writer takes the attitude of an impresario toward his themes, calculating each entrance and exit, Williams will begin or end his story as the spirit moves him; pausing to face his reader, he will take him into his confidence and speak his mind without recourse to stratagems of

ingratiation. Elliptical in some passages and naturalistic in others, Williams is perfectly conscious of writing but hostile to "literature." Out of "a straight impulse, without borrowing, without lie or complaint," he puts down on paper that which stirs him. His subjects are few and often minute, their scope is sharply circumscribed by his personal experience and by his voluntary seclusion within the local and immediate, he repeats himself frequently—yet these stories are exceptional for their authenticity and told not to provoke but to record. It is pain which is the source of values here. The dread of annihilation is ever present. "Christ, Christ! . . . How can a man live in the face of this daily uncertainty? How can a man not go mad with grief, with apprehension?" No grand conceits, no gratuitous excitements, no melodrama. There is no doing away with the staples of existence; no gallivanting on the banks of the Passaic River.

For what could be more dismal than life in these small industrial towns of New Jersey? The mills are worked by immigrant laborers, and their youngsters are "all over the city as soon as they can walk and say, "Paper!" The doctor visits these uprooted households, often angry at himself because of the tenderness in him that reaches out to these people, quite as often resigned to doing his job, to immersing himself in the finalities of human life. "To me," he writes, "it is a hard, barren life, where I am alone and unmolested (work as I do in the thick of it), though in constant danger lest some slip send me to perdition but which, being covetous not at all, I enjoy for the seclusion and primitive air of it."

The little girl, both of whose tonsils are covered with membrane, fights furiously to keep him from knowing her secret. Another one, a lank-haired girl of fifteen, is a powerful little animal upon whom you can stumble on the roof, behind the stairs "any time at all." A whole gang is on her trail. Cured of her pimples, how will this tenacious creature ever slash her way to the bliss recited on the radio? "The pure products of America go crazy," Williams once wrote in a poem. And these stories are familiar images of the same, released by that active element of sympathy which is to be prized above all else in the equipment of an artist. But this writer has no hankering for consistent explanations, for the constancy of reason; he seldom permits himself to ask why. "What are you going to do with a guy like that. Or why want to do anything with him. Except not miss him," he says of one of

his characters. This last is the point. He is content with grasping the fact, with creating a phenomenology; but the relations, social and historic, that might unify these facts and significate them on a plane beyond sensation or nostalgia or pathos he has no mind for. And this absence of what one might call, in his terms, ideological presumptuousness, while admirable in its modesty, also constitutes his defeat. However much of value there is in these facts of "hard history" and in the scrupulous gathering of their detail, the larger implications are systematically neglected. Thought is proscribed as anti-aesthetic. Yet, though habitually confined to the suggestive and purely descriptive, this prose nevertheless hold within itself some of the raw elements of a comprehensive consciousness.

But Williams does think about America, if only to sketch it in psychic outline. He is under the spell of its *mystique* and strains to encompass it in a vision. This need in him provides a contrast and relief to the phenomenological principle informing his work; and much of his charm flows from the interaction of his precise facts with his American mysticism. In his novel, *White Mule*, the fusion of these two qualities allowed a visible direction to emerge. "What then is it like, America?" asks Fraulein Von J. in "The Venus," which seems to me the best story in the collection. This German girl is a genuine Weimar-period object. She has a genius for formulating the most complex modern problems in the simplest terms. The daughter of a general, she comes to Italy to become a nun. But perhaps America—she questions the American, Evans, who carries a flint arrowhead in his pocket—could prove a satisfactory alternative to the Church? Evans speaks of the old pioneer houses of his ancestors, and of that "early phase" of America whose peculiar significance has been forgotten or misunderstood. The German girl holds the arrowhead in her hand, feeling its point and edge. "It must be even more lonesome and frightening in America than in Germany," she finally says. The story recalls us to the Williams of *In the American Grain*, a writer ravaged by this hemisphere's occult aboriginal past. In some ways Dr. Williams is really a medicineman.

IV. KOESTLER AND HOMELESS RADICALISM

It is above all the quality of relevance in Arthur Koestler that makes for the lively interest in him. This quality is not to be equated with the merely topical or timely. What enters into it, chiefly, is something far more difficult to capture—a sense of the present in its essence, a sense of contemporaneity at once compelling and discriminating. It is precisely for lack of this quality that most current writing in the tradition of radical journalism is so dull and depressing, putting our intelligence to sleep with its fatal immersion in backward problems; and where the problems are politically not backward, it is usually the approach that makes them so (*e.g.*, Harold Laski, Max Lerner and other spokesmen of official, comfortably situated Leftism).

Koestler, on the other hand, has taken hold with dramatic force of a large historical theme. He is at once the poet and ideologue of the homeless radical, and his unflagging analysis of this significant latter-day type—of his dilemma and pathos—has a tonic value compared to which the “positive contributions” featured in our liberal weeklies seem puerile and inane. Nothing is ultimately so enervating as unreal positiveness, whether it takes the form of the ultra-leftist’s faith in the imminence of the ideal revolution or the liberal’s acceptance of the Soviet myth in accordance with all the precepts of “wave of the future” romanticism. Koestler, despite certain bad slips in the past, is one of the very few writers of the Left not intimidated by the demand for easy affirmations. He understands the positive function of precisely those ideas that help, in Kierkegaard’s phrase, “to keep the wound of the negative open.”

Koestler is, of course, neither a systematic nor an original thinker. What he exemplifies, rather, is the finest type of European journalism, whose chief advantage over the best American brand lies in its capacity to move with ease within a cultural framework (ours is more efficient in the assembly and organization of facts). Thus Koestler's prose, in which the sensibility of politics is combined with that of literature in what might be described as a psycho-political style, is far superior to anything comparable in American journalism, whether of the straight or fictional variety. Admirable, too, is Koestler's capacity to invent new terms and to order his thought in pithy formulations that sum up an entire period or the experience of an entire generation. His verbal sense is not unlike Trotsky's; the writing of both is distinguished by epigrammatic speed and wit. But Koestler is apt to sacrifice precision for the sake of startling effects or romantic contrasts. His language is occasionally too showy for comfort; and an element of the meretricious is to be detected in his all too easy use of dashing advanced metaphors drawn from the natural sciences and the tantalizing vocabularies of the newer psychology. It might be said that in his books the phrase often goes beyond the content; that is the price he pays for his facile brilliance.

To my mind, Koestler's best work is to be found in *Spanish Testament* and *Scum of the Earth*, which are accounts of personal experience unmarred by the opportunistic turns his imagination takes when endowed with the freedom of the novelist to order his world as he pleases. For as a novelist Koestler has very little real feeling for existence as texture and pattern or for his characters as human beings over and above their assigned roles and settings. The truth is that these characters are efficient mouthpieces rather than people on their own account. Koestler is able to create an air of reality but scarcely the conviction of it, and none of his novels have that fictional density and integral control of experience by which we know the true artist in the narrative medium. To say, however, that Koestler is not a novelist to the manner born means less in his case than in the case of almost any other popular writer of fiction. Consider a writer like John Steinbeck, for instance. If one says of a novel by Steinbeck that it is without appreciable literary merit one is actually dismissing it *in toto*, for it certainly offers us nothing else by way of intelligence or relevant meaning. Most of our practising novelists are aware of the age only at a very low level, and their patterns of mean-

ing are tissues of banalities because their power of consciousness is only slightly above that of the mass that reads them. If Koestler, on the other hand, is mainly a novelist of the *Zeitgeist*, he is at least responsive to its virulence and mindful of its mystifications.

Thus Koestler's *Darkness at Noon* is the best study so far written of the mystifications let loose upon the world by the Moscow exhibition-trials. The dialectic of this novel, a dialectic that reveals the psychology of capitulation by which the old Bolshevik leadership was laid low, has a force and tension seldom equalled in the literature of the Russian Revolution. In Koestler's next novel, *Arrival and Departure*, the scene shifts from Russia to the West, and in this work, too, the author takes hold with beautiful candor the world-historical theme of the breakdown of the revolutionary cause as reflected in the disillusionment and frustration of its intellectual adherents. Thus the hero is the intellectual disarmed by the loss of his faith, the crusader in search of a new cross. Both the panic and promise of our age are concentrated in the several great political faiths that dominate it; and this can only mean that the political-minded individual who is so unfortunate as to have been deprived of his faith is sure to find himself in the predicament of having virtually lost his historical identity.

Such exactly is the situation of Peter Slavek, the young fugitive from a Nazi-occupied country in Central Europe, when he turns up in the capital of "Neutralia," the land without blackout. Peter is a veteran of the Communist movement who in prison had stood up heroically to beatings and torture. Yet now he has renounced the movement, having come to realize that it is but a tool of "utopia betrayed," and that despite its apparent readiness to furnish sound reasons for its vertiginous changes of front the idea behind is dead. Peter tries to enlist in the British army, but at this initial stage his action is lacking in conviction, being more or less mechanically determined by his anti-fascist past. There can be no escape for Peter from his ordeal. He must pay the penalty of his lost illusions by going through the supremely painful experience of locating himself anew in a world now strangely drained of value. To survive he must discover a way of life other than that of the socialist militant—a way of life that will enable him to redefine his true identity.

Of course, this young man is fated to play the hero to the end, for when last seen he is pulling the rip-cord of a parachute and hurtling through space on a secret mission to enemy country. The main substance of the novel, however, is to be found in his recital of his experiences to Dr. Sonia Bolgar, a female likened to a "carnivorous flower" who is at the same time a specialist in the modern branches of psychology and "dream-surgery." Part of Peter's recital is an account of the Nazi terror which is a truly inspired piece of writing. Especially fine is the chapter entitled "Mixed Transports." The rest consists of psychological disputation and analysis of the motives of the middle-class intellectual as a revolutionary type. This is the element in the novel for which the author has been sharply criticized, a criticism that is correct, of course, in so far as Koestler appears to call into question the social value of revolutionary action by attributing to it a neurotic origin. Such procedure is an obvious example of the genetic fallacy. It has likewise been said that Koestler traduces the psychoanalytic profession by depicting Sonia, its representative in the story, as an image of polymorphous sexuality and the surrender to purely instinctual life. Through this maneuver psychoanalysis is censured for its unflattering picture of human nature much in the same way that right-wing polemicists have at times gratuitously censured Marxism for the evils of the class struggle. It seems to me, however, that Koestler's attitude to Freudian ideas, is not in the least hostile; and I would explain his fancy picture of Sonia by his tendency to sensationalize his material even at the cost of obscuring his meaning. This novelist is enough of a journalist not to be able to resist a scoop. Also, one should keep in mind that Sonia is cast in the role of a proponent of the non-political life. Now a writer as thoroughly political as Koestler cannot but identify the non-political life with a lower form of existence, that is to say, with the sub-historical. It is in this sense, I think, that we should interpret his dislike of Sonia, voiced by one of the characters, who speaks of her as an "opulent Amazon" maintaining an "odious intimacy with the forbidden regions where archaic monsters dwelt. . . ."

But Koestler's treatment of the Freudian motive is not nearly so dubious as his resolution of the political problem in this novel. The problem facing his hero is that of reconciling his radical convictions with his enlistment in the British army, in the service of values gone

musty, "whose force is the power of inertia." The answer given by Koestler is that even if in the dynamics of history the bourgeois democracies act not as the engine but the brake, there is real need for a brake when the engine begins running wild. This is good enough, perhaps, as a reason for a policy of strategic expediency in supporting a democratic war against totalitarianism in order to obtain a second chance for the socialist cause. There is so little pathos, however, in such calculations that Koestler makes every effort to lay hold of something more profound. Hence we are told that, furthermore, "reasons do not matter," and that "he who accepts in spite of his objections . . . he will be secure." The latter argument is wholly unrelated to the first argument, and by bringing it forward the way he does Koestler appears to capitulate to the irrational drives of present-day politics. Yet even this turns out to be not sufficiently "profound," for later on it is asserted that the age of science is over and that salvation will come through a "new god" who is about to be born. Here we are finally consoled with the rhetoric of the new religiosity, whose ambition it is to replace the newly lost illusions with illusions lost long ago. If a new god is about to be born and as yet we know, as Koestler admits, neither his message nor his cult, then why not let the world go hang while we wait for this unknown god to reveal himself?

It is worth noting, however, that in *The Yogi and the Commissar*, a volume of essays brought out shortly after the appearance of *Arrival and Departure*, Koestler seems to have overcome his mystical yearnings, for here he speaks of his refusal to join the "exotic hermitage fit for Yogi exercises." The title-piece of this volume strikes me as of small consequence insofar as its key-terms, Yogi and Commissar, merely describe the polarization of belief between the concepts of change from without and change from within; and in another sense these terms come to little more than a rather sensational restatement of the old *divertissement* of the psychologists that divides all of us into introverts and extroverts. But if not meaningful in the way of uncovering a permanent human contradiction, these terms do have meaning in their application to present-day realities. For it is the vileness of what Koestler calls "Commissar-ethics," whether of the fascist or Stalinist variety, that has created the historical situation determining the movement of so many intellectuals to the ultra-violet pole of the Yogi. The Yogis in our midst are continually

gaining prestige and new recruits, with sorry results, however, so far as creative ideas are concerned. Auden, for instance, neglecting his splendid gifts as satirist and observer of the external world, has gone to school to Kierkegaard and Barth only to emerge as an exponent of stylized anxiety. Marx saw in the spirit of spiritless conditions the social essence of religion, and it may well be said that except for this sentiment of wretchedness the present appeal of supernaturalism has quite literally no other objective content.

What is of considerable value in Koestler's essay on the intelligentsia is the contrast drawn between the historical roles of the Russian and Western intellectuals. In the intellectuals Koestler sees a social group driven by "an aspiration to independent thought"—a group now declining in all countries, debilitated by its political experiences and gradually penned in by the growing power of the State.—"Thus the intelligentsia, once the vanguard of the ascending bourgeoisie, becomes the lumpen-bourgeoisie in the age of its decay." This last seems particularly applicable to America. Not so long ago a good many of our intellectuals were economically no better off than lumpen-proletarians, a position which allowed them to assume attitudes of cultural intransigence toward society, whereas of late, what with the prosperity of the last war and the proliferation of jobs, both in the government and in educational institutions, the once impoverished intellectuals have been converted almost to a man into lumpen-bourgeois. And lumpen-bourgeois, who combine an inherent sense of insecurity with sufficient status and revenue to make them pine for more, are notoriously feeble in their aspirations to independent thought.

When it comes, however, to Koestler's imputation of neuroticism to the intelligentsia as a group, one cannot agree with him quite so easily. In his view neuroticism is the "professional disease" of the intellectuals because of the pathological pattern produced by the hostile pressure of society. Koestler may be right, but I cannot say that I found his argument convincing. Precise etiological data are missing; without a controlled Freudian analysis the Freudian conclusions hang in the air; and in general the kind of observation that Koestler brings to bear is literary rather than scientific. It seems to me that he assimilates the intellectuals far too readily to the artist-types among them, who are after all but a minority within a minority. The personality-structure of the

artist is quite different from that of most members of the intelligentsia, whose connection is with the more technical and less estranged forms of culture and who are not noted in any special way for the vulnerability, complication or perversity of their subjective life.

Equally schematic, to my mind, are the arguments advanced in some of Koestler's essays that deal directly with literature. Thus in "The Novelist's Temptations" he makes the point that to function properly the novelist must possess "an all-embracing knowledge of the essential currents and facts (including statistics), of the ideas and theories (including the natural sciences) of his time." The saving proviso is that "this knowledge is not for actual use. . . . It is for use by implication." Even with this proviso, however, this appears to be an excessively rationalistic view of the literary process. The movements of the imagination are tortuous and obscure; great works of fiction have often been created by compulsive and extremely one-sided talents (consider the cases of Gogol or Kafka). The element of knowledge in imaginative literature is easily overestimated. What is important in writing as in art generally is the quality of relevance—a quality perhaps synonymous with that "sense of modernity" which Baudelaire stressed so frequently and for which he praised artists like Courbet and Manet. This modernity can take various and contradictory forms, some of them unrecognizable to those above all concerned with being up to date. Kafka, for instance, is deeply modern not because the latest acquisitions of the social and natural sciences are embodied in his work but because it is reverberant with the feelings of loss and unreality characteristic of modern man. Being *au courant* with the latest facts and theories is desirable in itself and can certainly do the novelist a lot of good. There is no need, however, to elevate such useful knowledge to a prerequisite of the creative life.

V. DE VOTO AND KULTURBOLSCHEWISMUS

In this country we have been largely spared the vicious campaigns against *Kulturbolschewismus* by which art and literature have been undermined in several European countries. The second World War did not pass, however, without provoking in America too a nationalist reaction in writing which was of course part and parcel of the world-wide attack on all cultural forms of dissidence and experiment. Bernard DeVoto's *The Literary Fallacy* is the leading document of this reaction, and it is as mindless a tract as any produced by those who have set themselves the task of subverting the critical spirit of the modern period. It deserves to be noticed, if only to keep the record straight.

First, as to the reactions to DeVoto. Some counterblows were struck, but the most widely-read reply—that of Sinclair Lewis in *The Saturday Review of Literature*—turned out to be little more than a lively exercise in vituperation. For what was Lewis doing if not playing possum when he denied that the literature of the nineteen-twenties was dominated by any specific movement or tendency? And what point was there in his dragging in the names of people like Booth Tarkington and Edith Wharton? Such names in no way prove that the creative work of the twenties is without unity and that DeVoto was therefore attacking something without real existence. The representative figures of that decade are well known to everyone. Lewis's strategy showed him up as belying his own past, as repudiating the very movement in the absence of which it is inconceivable that he could have written either *Main Street* or *Babbitt*. He rejected implicitly what his seeming antagonist, DeVoto,

rejected explicitly. Like Van Wyck Brooks and, for all one knows, DeVoto too, Lewis is a fugitive from an earlier self.

But for sheer brashness in proclaiming philistine values, DeVoto beats all comers; and he is a terrible show-off besides. Familiar as he is with a great many details of American history, he insists on exhibiting his knowledge, regardless of its degree of relevance to the subject at hand. Thus he writes a really incredible chapter—and that in a book of six short chapters—in which he goes on page after page telling us with a straight face all about the advances made by American medical men in the treatment of burns and about John Wesley Powell, a geologist who helped develop the Forest Service, the National Park Service and several learned societies, and who wrote, among other books, a *Report on the Lands of the Arid Regions of the United States*. “Mr. Brooks has not heard about it,” gloats DeVoto, “nor Mr. Mumford, nor Mr. Stearns, Mr. Lewisohn, Mr. Frank, Mr. Parrington, or Mr. Hicks, not even Mr. Edmund Wilson or Mr. Kazin.”

Perhaps none of those ill-assorted gentlemen ever “heard about it,” but if DeVoto had any sense of method in handling ideas he would have kept the treatment of burns out of it, and Powell too. If his point is, however, that ours is a great and wonderful country precisely because of such phenomena, then he must be laboring under the delusion that America has a monopoly on medical scientists and public-spirited geologists. Furthermore, neither Brooks nor any other critic of American life has ever complained of our insufficient progress in applied science and technology. On the contrary.

It is DeVoto, also, who gives us the true-blue American version of the reactionary fantasy that it is writers of the type of Proust that caused the fall of France to the Nazis. He declares that it is the “description of the United States as a pluto-democracy and its people as degenerate” in the writing of the twenties “which forms the basis of Hitler’s understanding of America in *Mein Kampf* and elsewhere. . . . The correspondence is so obvious, so often an identity, that there must be a causal relationship between them.” Here you have the essence of what our retrograde times have produced—the *amalgam* palmed off as the leading argument and as the answer to all questions. As for the “literary fallacy”—defined by DeVoto as the overvaluation of literature as against life—who holds to

it more than he does, when he attributes to the work of literary men so much political weight and influence?

Among the writers he belabors is T. S. Eliot, whom he accuses of having written disrespectfully of such "little people" as the young man carbuncular and the typist home at teatime. He asserts that since people of that sort stood up to the London blitz, the author of *The Waste Land* must now hang his head in shame. But even if we grant DeVoto his O.W.I. test of poetic truth, he still must account for the fact that the German young man carbuncular and the German typist also stood up to the blitz—a fact which, in his terms, would tend to prove that fascism is as good as democracy.

Where his worst philistinism comes out is in his attitude toward the war. He sees the war as a spiritual triumph that once and for all gave the lie to the criticism of modern life contained in modern literature. It never occurs to him that the virulence and pessimism of that literature have been completely justified by the war. No wonder he maintains that whereas American society was "rugged, lively and vital" in the twenties, American writing "became increasingly debilitated, capricious, querulous and irrelevant." Writers repudiated their country and shut themselves off from its realities. Now a charge of this kind could be substantiated, it seems to me, only in one way, and that is by analyzing some of the typical and outstanding works of that decade (say *Babbitt*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Triumph of the Egg*, *Beyond the Horizon*, *The American Tragedy*, etc.) so as to show that there is no correspondence between them and the national life, that their revelation of the national character and conduct is either false or irrelevant. Yet this DeVoto fails to do. For the most part he is content merely to hurl accusations and "to glow belligerently with his country," to borrow a phrase aimed by Henry James at the DeVotos of a past age. And whenever DeVoto does come down to cases he unknowingly proves the reverse of what he set out to prove.

This becomes particularly clear in his dealings with Brooks. The latter is an obsessive theme with DeVoto, and a gratuitous one besides, since he and Brooks are actually comrades-in-arms. For DeVoto locates the source of the literature of the twenties in the early work of Brooks—a notion patently nonsensical. A literature of such dimensions and variety can hardly be characterized otherwise than as an organic ex-

pression of American society. To be sure, the early Brooksonian thesis influenced a good many writers, but DeVoto falls into sheer fantasy when he blames Brooks for the faults of novelists like Lewis and Hemingway. The truth is that it is exactly the Brooksonian thesis which best explains those faults. The lack of "maturity of mind, maturity of emotions, maturity of character and experience" in both Lewis and Hemingway is not to be explained in terms of any literary fallacy, for no two authors are less addicted to making literature the measure of existence; it can be adequately accounted for only in relation to those forces in American life, charted by Brooks in such studies as *Letters and Leadership* and *America's Coming of Age*, which frustrate the artist and arrest his development. These forces are still at work in American civilization, and a critic like DeVoto is helping to perpetuate their dominance when he assaults the writers who at one time tried to overcome it.

When it comes to evaluating the literary art of the modern age Brooks and DeVoto now see eye to eye. Brooks, looking to poor dear old Whittier for his salvation, is more archaic in his approach. DeVoto is not quite so predisposed to favor the past. In his judgment the best American writers of our times are Carl Sandburg, E. A. Robinson, Willa Cather, Stephen Vincent Benét, and Robert Frost. The real trouble with him, one suspects, is that he loves literature not at all.

